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ABSTRACT

The problems and challenges of teaching adolescents are discussed in this collection of essays on middle school education. Part I introduces five basic themes that underly suggestions and considerations offered in subsequent writings. These basic themes--Community, Caring, Connectedness, Color, and Collaboration--are the "Five C's" that form the foundation for specific programs and practices discussed in the remaining essays in this booklet. Part II contains reflections on the values of affective education and the concept of teacher teaming. Exploratory programs and courses in the middle school's curriculum are the subject of one essay in this section, and multiage/multigrade grouping is discussed in another. In Part III, five essays deal with the advisory role of the teacher, cooperative teaching, instructional priorities, self-directed learning, and reading programs. The final section contains four essays on the topics of preventive discipline, student responsibility, and managing mainstreamed students. The last essay presents a series of resolutions for middle school teachers. (JD)

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NANCY DODA

Foreword and Editing by John H. Lounsbury
NATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

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**NATIONAL
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ASSOCIATION**

The NMSA Publications Committee is pleased to sponsor this collection of Nancy Doda's contributions to the *Middle School Journal*. Her ideas and practical suggestions for classroom teachers have already proven to be useful. The Committee believes this pamphlet will make them available to an even wider audience and increase thereby their positive influence.

Appreciation is expressed to Nancy Doda for her cooperation in updating and supplementing her columns and to John Lounsbury for conceiving, editing and overseeing the production of this important contribution to the literature of middle school education.

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Foreword

Don Eichhorn and I were eating lunch together at the Hilton Inn in Gainesville, Florida, at the tail-end of a middle school conference in early 1976. We were discussing our ideas about the *Middle School Journal*. I had recently assumed the editorship, and Don had been named to the newly established Publications Committee. Central to our conversation was the need to reach teachers through the *Journal*. The idea of a column written by a classroom teacher had emerged. After lunch we stepped outside and were enjoying a breath of fresh, Florida air when Paul George walked up. A bit of small talk followed. Then Paul, pointing to the figure of a tall, slender young lady who had exited the hotel and was moving toward the parking lot, said, spontaneously but emphatically, "There goes the best damn language arts teacher in the state of Florida."

A light flashed, and my non-verbal communication must have been excellent for when I glanced at Don it was clear he had "read" me and his expression was saying, in effect, "Sure, why not." So without a word being spoken, and almost instantaneously, one of the best decisions I ever made had been consummated.

Striding rapidly, I caught up with that figure Paul had pointed out just as she reached her car. I introduced myself and right there and then I propositioned her - would she write a column, "Teacher to Teacher," for the *Middle School Journal*. She was receptive, so correspondence followed with details and deadlines and soon the column had become a reality. And that is the true story of how young Nancy Doda's career as the popular feature writer for our *Journal* got started.

Nancy's gift of communicating effectively quickly made me and the *Journal* look good. Her column has engendered more positive reaction from readers than any other single item in the *Journal*.

Since Nancy has now left the classroom - for a while at least - in order to pursue her advanced graduate work at the University of Florida, she felt it appropriate to terminate her tenure as column author. Our Publications Committee reluctantly accepted her resignation, but readily endorsed my recommendation to publish a booklet based on her columns.

This account of events should make it apparent why I have derived a great deal of pleasure in coordinating and editing this publication, and why I am proud to present it to the NMSA membership and other professionals. Although the booklet is composed primarily of Nancy's previously published columns, which appeared in the *Middle School Journal* between July, 1976 and November, 1980, the materials have been revised, reorganized, and are supplemented by new materials. The result is a fresh booklet, one that will delight the many fans Nancy Doda already has, and, at the same time, engage quickly new readers. Most importantly, it will meet the real need that exists in the middle school movement for materials written by classroom teachers for classroom teachers. *Teacher to Teacher* ought to be available to the faculty members of every intermediate institution in America.

The Association appreciates Nancy's willingness to contribute to the *Middle School Journal* over the past several years and to prepare the revisions and additions for this booklet. The middle school movement is likewise in her due, for she has not only contributed through her writings and work with school systems but by being a professional prototype - young, vibrant, enthusiastic, caring, and fully competent in the classroom with kids. She practices what she preaches.

John H. Lounsbury
Editor, *Middle School Journal*

Part I

From Behind My Classroom Door



Five C's for Middle School Teachers

The poster that declares, "No one ever said teaching was going to be easy," has become a popular feature in many offices and teachers' lounges in schools across the country. In view of what teaching is like for most middle school teachers, I have decided there ought to be a poster expressly for middle school teachers, but more appropriately worded, "No one ever said teaching in the middle was going to be possible."

All classroom teachers work hard, but I am convinced that the task of teaching transescents can be the most puzzling, frustrating and exhausting job of all. Early adolescents are experiencing dramatic physical, intellectual and social changes. They are young lives in momentum and flux, perplexed and uncertain, searching to find out who they are and who they can become. In today's fast-moving, crisis-full and often indifferent society, their struggle to grow presents an unbelievable challenge with high risk of defeat. No wonder teachers, as well as parents and administrators, often query about life after middle school.

There's no need to despair though, because while the job's gotten tougher we have gotten stronger. For years, teachers in the middle didn't have the kind of school armor needed to help students in this unique phase of life. Junior high was, in retrospect, American education's second-hand rose with its teacher education's wallflowers. Teaching in the middle used to be like working in the Bermuda triangle of education where lives disappeared without explanation or reason.

Today, however, early adolescence is "in" and educators and citizens alike have a new found commitment to the improvement of this phase of schooling. Instead of some devouring school sea abyss, the middle school has become a lighthouse for teachers in the middle. Conceptually dedicated to the growth and development of early adolescents, the middle school offers us an educational promise.

Middle school is easier said than done. Building the kind of school capable of making a difference in the lives of early adolescents requires an allegiance to certain educationally significant features. My allegiance to what might be characterized as the 5'C's of middle school teaching has been steadfast and is reflected in all of my writings. For me, these features represent the bare essentials of a good middle school and the main ingredients for good middle school teaching.

Community

If I were to characterize the prime sentiment of today's kids in a single word, I would say "starved." As I have watched middle school kids day in and day out, I have seen frantic, hungry faces desperately reaching out for love with a capital L. Though the word itself has been distorted by excessive use and abuse, it nonetheless represents a number one basic for middle school kids. Social biologist, Ashley Montagu, found in his study of infancy and childhood, that "..... love is without question the most important experience in the life of a human being."

It is critical, however, that the notion of love be translated into workable programs and practices if middle schools are to be life-giving places for kids. Whereas the back-to-basics push has emphasized the 3 R's, my priority in a forward-to-basics direction is what has often been called the 4th R - Relationships. As is suggested by the title of Terry Borton's book, *Reach, Touch, and Teach*, reaching and touching precede teaching. Before we can teach kids, we will have to find ways to reach them and touch them, and before that will be possible we will have to design schools which nurture closeness.

Middle schools can be large and anonymous places for kids where individuals wander from day to day detached and alone, or they can be small, personal places where students can be known as individual persons but who are connected to their peers and teachers in some significant way. A good school for early adolescents, a real middle school, must have first and foremost a sense of community. Students should be arranged in groups small enough for the emergence of a meaningful community experience but large enough to provide for more diversity than the self-contained classroom. For most middle schools, community is achieved with an interdisciplinary team arrangement where four teachers, for example, are joined in common concern for about 120 youngsters. With such an arrangement, smaller, more personal communities for learning can exist and students are close enough to reach. Without it, they may be beyond reaching.

Caring

Even in schools with the closeness of learning communities or teams, kids may still get lost. Every middle school child, both the ten year boy who tears the crotch out of his pants and the fourteen year old girl who gets pregnant, ought to have one adult in his school who knows him better and cares more about him than anyone else. Leaving the development of this special teacher-student relationship to the winds of fate though, is a mistake we can't afford to make. The 4th R must be a visible basic. The middle school must have a curriculum for caring.

If smaller communities for learning can help us reach kids, then an even smaller family at school, something of a homebase, could help us touch kids as well. Commitment to this second C means we willingly establish workable small group guidance programs in our middle schools which let every child, with the help of a caring adult, discover feelings, explore and clarify values and resolve a host of early adolescent problems. For too long the thousands of affective objectives written in the hundreds of curriculum guides have been ignored. Affective education assumes

we can in fact teach kids to understand themselves, their world and others. If we are to teach early adolescents, if we are to help them in their struggle to grow, that is precisely what we must do.

Connectedness

If you agree with me that the 4th R is basic for middle schools, consider what I believe to be the middle school's best kept secret - multiage grouping. In a country where more than 40,000,000 Americans move every two years and the average duration of any interpersonal relationship is less today than ever before, long-lasting, continuing relationships are a rare and fondly remembered commodity. In the process of humanizing middle schools, I am convinced that we ought to build into our programs the time to establish long-term, nurturing relationships as well as the opportunity to initiate them. Originally, non-graded classes were intended to remove labels and focus on the individual learner. Though these goals have been realized, evidence shows that in non-graded middle schools where kids and teachers spend 3-4 years together discipline problems are less severe, vandalism declines, and, most important, strong teacher-student connections are established for kids who are struggling to be someone, somewhere. The third C for middle schools, then, is that unique kind of connection that evolves in relationships when there is opportunity for a continued interpersonal investment. With alternative patterns of student grouping, middle schools can provide for something more powerful than any instructional innovation or new technique. When schools are places where people are connected in significant ways, where grouping lets teachers and students spend more than one school year together, then they can really make a difference.

Color

Middle school students are alive with curiosity and questioning, ready to sing in the chorus, play the clarinet, join the French club, and drop all three shortly thereafter. It shouldn't surprise us then that their skill achievement, and their growth and development in all areas, is highly correlated with increased opportunities to explore, experiment and experience. It might be said, for the kids we teach, the more frills, the more skills.

Unfortunately, with the push for the basics and accountability, many middle schools are replacing exploratory programs and special interest classes with more of the 3R's. Curriculums are equated with the textbook and teachers are feeling pressed to drill, drill, drill. Sadly, we have reduced the curriculums of far too many middle schools to what is cold, clammy and colorless, leaving teachers handicapped in their efforts to keep kids involved and interested. Middle schools must have Color. Exploratory, special interest programs, clubs, special units, independent study, and all the frills we might be tempted to neglect, deserve a place in the school schedule. Without a chance to explore, to try out talents and to enjoy school, our students will find lots to do at school besides learn- turn off, turn out or drop out. "Curiosity killed the cat," and it could kill us if we don't Color it in the middle.

Collaboration

The final C, Collaboration, is an invitation for all middle school teachers to join heads and hearts in creating and maintaining the middle schools we need. With the challenge of improving skills without mutilating minds and spirits, with the challenge of maintaining discipline without neglecting basic human rights, with the challenge of teaching today's transescents without burning out, teachers and administrators in our middle schools must join in our struggle not just to survive, but to prevail.

Teachers, to be the committed professionals so desperately needed, must believe that they contribute to the shape of their schools outside the walls of the classroom. I would wager that with meaningful school rights, responsibilities and effective teacher-leadership, more teachers in more middle schools would be newly inspired and deeply committed to the task of teaching transescents. When teachers are organized in interdisciplinary teams with full responsibility to make decisions concerning student scheduling, budgeting of materials, and the use of instructional time and resources, cooperation begins to grow and democracy to flourish. As teachers, we may not be able to insure that such collaboration will exist, but we can promote its growth by demonstrating our willingness and our ability to take part in the larger school affairs.

These 5 C's are life affirming school qualities. They are, in fact, simple life truths. Their presence can transform an ordinary middle school environment into an extraordinary one. They represent my fundamental beliefs about schools, teaching and learning, as well as my beliefs about the qualities essential to productive and full human life. As I move ahead in my personal and professional life, I will continue to carry with me the significance of community, caring, connectedness, color, and collaboration. I believe if we are to create a better world and win the legendary race between education and social disaster, we must build schools designed to win that race. For me, the middle school with community, caring, connectedness, color and collaboration, is just that kind of school.

In the remaining sections of this book, I have described specific programs and practices which exemplify the 5C's. It is my sincere hope that these basics and the complimentary programs and practices will enrich your teaching life and the lives of the youngsters with whom you work.

Part II

**Middle School Basics:
The Building Blocks**



Affective Education: The Advisor-Advisee Way

The Back to Basics movement, past and present, has encouraged middle schools to shape and reshape their programs and practices in response to the public's demands for accountability in education. While I too have shared a concern for our failure to teach basic skills to many of our country's children, I am more concerned as I watch our pedagogic pendulum swing back to the three R's that we are losing touch with what is equally basic—our role in helping kids become happy, self-actualized and fully functioning human beings.

As evidenced by the difficulties inherent in adolescence and by the continually recurring adolescent tragedies, kids in the middle grades need special help in their struggle to grow. If we fail to provide help, I am afraid that not only will many children grow up without the skills to read but they may grow up never fully realizing all of their potential capabilities and talents, never learning how to make decisions and formulate values, never learning how to relate to others in a meaningful and satisfying way; and, never acknowledging their preciousness and worth as human beings.

Middle schools and middle school teachers have a unique and exciting opportunity to finally make the thousands of affective objectives written in the hundreds of curriculum guides come to life in viable school programs.

I. The Schoolwide Picture

Persons involved in the middle school would readily concede that one of its fundamental goals is that of bridging the gap between the elementary school and the high school. With regard to teacher-student relationships and student personal development, this bridging characteristic is particularly important.

One way middle schools have attempted to serve this bridging function is by having some small group, affective education program. Typically, these programs have been labeled Homebase, Advisor-Advisee or Small Group Guidance. Basically, an advisor-advisee program, as an example, consists of assigning every teacher, specialists included, a small group of approximately twenty-five students which would meet as a group for some scheduled part of the school day. In this advisor-advisee class, the teacher serves as the advisor, school expert and affective guide for each child in the group.

Implementing a program like the Advisor-Advisee is an involved task. In fact many difficulties arise because of a failure to consider the time, planning and commitment necessary for success. Here are some suggestions to consider:

1. Staff development is a terribly important prerequisite for successful affective education programs. Often difficulties result because teachers and thus students don't know what such program is designed to do nor how they could achieve affective results. Programs attempted without adequate teacher preparation could make the affective education program disappointing to both teachers and students, resulting in increased discipline problems, extra, unrewarded work for teachers and a tendency to turn off to the idea of affective education altogether.
2. If possible an advisor-advisee class should be smaller than the average academic class of 30-35. One way some schools have managed to cut down on the teacher-pupil ratio is by involving almost every available adult in the school.
3. It seems to be important that these classes meet every day at a regularly scheduled time. Further, it has in some schools been more readily accepted and valued by students when it is scheduled at the opening of the school day. In doing so, teachers and administrators are openly admitting its importance and students are less apt to view it as "free time." Opening every school day with such a program has other advantages as well. It gives those students with problems from home a chance to work through difficulties before beginning their academic work. Naturally, students will be better able to learn if they are not troubled or upset. Scheduling such classes at the start of the day is certainly not the only workable arrangement. It should be scheduled however, at a place which does not suggest it is merely an appendage added on to an already complete school day.
4. In schools, where homebase or advisor-advisee classes are in operation, the length of the class ranges from 20-35 minutes long. If the period is to be uninterrupted, 25 minutes seems to be adequate with often restless middle school kids. On the other hand, if schoolwide announcements, scheduling and related paperwork are to be continually interrupting factors, more time may be desirable.
5. Teachers ought to have freedom and flexibility in designing their own homebase or advisor-advisee classes. It would be advisable, however, if prior to implementing such a program, schoolwide affective goals could be determined. Whether or not career education and sex education, for example, are to be taught via these special classes is something to be decided for the entire school. Then, copies of these objectives ought to be available for all teachers for use in designing their class activities.
6. Counselors can play a vital role in initiating and maintaining a complete affective education program in the middle school. In the beginning stages, they are a number one source for teacher-training and they can continue to aid teachers in the designing of special units or activities for their individual classes. In addition, the fact that kids are now in groups especially designed for affective reasons could make it possible for counselors to meet with many more students for counseling and testing purposes.

This list is not intended to rule out other considerations, perhaps more specific, which deserve attention. It is simply to serve as a guide for those in the planning stages.

II. Inside the Classroom

Though decisions made concerning the schoolwide structure of an affective education program are critical and may either hinder or help individual classroom teacher, I am convinced that what goes on in the advisor-advisee class between the teacher and her students is the final proof of the program. Organizing this class in a way that allows the teacher to be the advisor, school expert and affective guide for each student is of supreme importance, and decisions concerning its design should be made with great care.

In offering suggestions to teachers it would be of little value to simply state what works for me since teaching styles always reflect our individual personalities. Rather, I would like to make some general suggestions which could be applicable for almost any teacher in any middle school, who is beginning with an affective education class. Behind all of my suggestions are some broad goals which seem to have constantly demanded attention in my own experience with an advisor-advisee group. Under two expansive topics they are:

II. Student-Teacher Relationships

- A. Getting to know each student exceedingly well.
- B. Letting students get to know you well.
- C. Helping students get to know each other.
- D. Helping students get to know themselves.

II. Community

- A. Helping the group care about the group itself.
- B. Helping the group learn to work/play together.
- C. Helping the group learn to talk/listen together.
- D. Helping the group be self-directed.

Each of these goals can be articulated in an advisor-advisee class. To do so the group must have variety in the nature of the activities they do. A continuing, intensive encounter group would be no more desirable than an affective education class in which the students did art work every day. Balance of emphasis is the key!

For some teachers achieving a balanced program is best facilitated by a permanent weekly schedule. A sample schedule that I have used may help to illustrate this point. The schedule had four basic components with one repeated part. They were: 1) Creative Expression; 2) The Valuing Process; 3) The Group Time; 4) The Valuing Process; 5) Individual Conference and Academic Work Time. This sample weekly schedule, which is designed to be ongoing is only one means of establishing a multifocused program. These categories, however, are each broad enough so as to encompass a wide array of activities. Using these same components, a teacher could choose her own activities and achieve a complete and balanced advisor-advisee program.

Even with a well-balanced class schedule other factors can interfere with the success of your advisor-advisee class. The following are recommendations to promote success:

1. Have a set of overall goals for your affective education class. If one is not provided by the school, write your own. Any successful instructional program rests on valued goals and objectives. Moreover, affective education assumes that we can in fact teach kids to understand themselves, others and their living experience. It's up to us to decide what as well as how.
2. Orient both your students and their parents to the concept of advisor-advisee early in the program. Parents are remarkably receptive to the concept and they are often willing to participate. Students are more eager to cooperate when they know the program's rhyme and reason.
3. As the school expert on each child, try to meet or call the parents of each child several times during the year. Knowing the parents will help you to function more effectively as that child's advisor and affective guide.
4. As difficult as it may be, it is advisable, as advisors and affective guides, to maintain a non-moralizing attitude. What middle school kids need and want least is to be told what to do. More than ever they need our unconditional positive regard coupled with a clarifying, questioning and guiding voice. It is best if we can help students examine their own behavior and feelings to help them do so in the future. Some part of a balanced program ought to be devoted to this task but the process of helping kids clarify values should be continuous.
5. Teacher can be more effective advisors if they can be more effective listeners. Middle school kids want to be heard. Letting kids know we want to hear them really makes a difference. Moreover, it presents an inviting model for students to copy.
6. Make it a point to have special group outings and affairs. This, as always, encourages a very needed sense of unity. The advisor-advisee class should be like a family at school.
7. Spend time with students *individually*. Some students get lost in a group and every child needs to know that you really care about all of him; his work at school, his life at home, his problems and his successes.
8. Share yourself with your kids. Let students know as much about you as you are willing to disclose. Students in your advisor-advisee class have the opportunity of getting to know you, perhaps far better than any of the other children you teach. Your willingness to share also sets a pattern of behavior students may choose to model.

A list such as this could never be complete enough. I hope, however, that it can help teachers just beginning with an affective education program or those for whom such a program has not yet seen success. If you as a teacher can help your middle school design an affective education program and if you can design an affective education class which really lets you make a difference in the lives of the children you teach, then you are to be proudly hailed. For to the middle school, affective education is basic, to the middle school teacher, it's a chance to make a difference, and to the middle school child, it is the difference.

Teaming: Burdens and Blessings

Teaming is both a burden and a blessing. In theory, it is a joining, connecting an building force. In practice, it is too often like a poorly built campfire—perhaps well fueled, but somehow unable to burn brightly. Through my experience as a team member and a team leader, I have clarified my notions about teaming in the middle school by gradually uncovering its realities and its possibilities—its burdens and its blessings.

The middle school and the interdisciplinary team go hand and hand. Roughly defined, the interdisciplinary team suggests that teachers from varying disciplines are organized in small core groups to share in the instruction of a given community of learners. The act of organizing students and teachers in smaller, more personal communities makes sense for kids in the middle grades. We know that middle schoolers in order to grow and develop happily, require much more than incidental caring. We know too that middle schoolers are ready for the challenge of broadened academic horizons. With just these needs, I would wager that the degree to which they are satisfied by a middle school is directly proportionate to the quality of teaming that exists in that school.

In middle schools throughout the country, teaming has taken on various shapes. Students are grouped in teams either developmentally, by grade or, in some instances, randomly balanced with multiage grouping. In all cases, however, teacher have joined hands in a common concern for certain youngsters, and it is in the resulting human community that special, even magical things can occur.

I. Establishing the Basics

If you agree that teaming is a basic for middle schools and for middle school learners, then I would like to invite you to carefully examine my suggestions written for schools and teachers who are involved in teaming. My suggestions are rooted in a concern for the development of strong teams capable of joining, connecting and building for kids.

There are certain basics which ought to exist within any junior high or middle school structure if authentic teaming is to flourish. Perhaps first and by far most obvious, teams within a school ought to have balanced teacher populations where teachers of contrasting strengths, personalities, instructional expertise and teaching experience are pooled together. Likewise, the student populations on teams ought to be as balanced as possible according to sex, intelligence, race and exceptionalities.

Second to my concern for balance is the need for physical distinction. The critical feature of team identity is tremendously facilitated when the teams are housed in

separate and distinct locations in a school. In a traditional building, where classrooms are only connected by an adjoining hallway, it is advisable to have teaming teachers in neighboring classrooms so that an entire team of students and teachers are close throughout most of the school day.

As a third basic, I have identified the need for a central team work area or planning room. Teachers who are expected to work together effectively need a place for planning, meeting, storing and refueling. In addition to a place, together-time is essential. Some block of time, however minimal, should be designated as team time, so that regular team meetings and planning sessions can be carried on. Schools having difficulty scheduling team planning time, however, should not turn away from the team organization altogether.

My fourth and final basic is the conviction that in order for the teams to be fully functioning communities for teachers and students, team autonomy must exist. Though some degree of autonomy is inevitable when teams are visible within a school, true autonomy requires team leadership with effective representation in school decisions, some piece of the financial pie (i.e., materials or money), and the responsibility for the scheduling and grouping of team students. Team leaders, usually selected by the school administration or voted in by experienced team members, provide the team with unity and direction as they organize team meetings and events, facilitate better teaming relations, function as a check on team instructional programs and plans, and represent the team in school policy making as the opportunity should arise. Giving leadership and authority to a team is a step toward team autonomy but the process of decentralizing the goods and wares within a school has an equally growth-producing effect on teams and teaming. Since decentralized budgeting is not feasible in all school systems at this time, I would recommend that every team in a school have its own set of materials and supplies stored in the team work area, to be used throughout the year. Teams will protect their own interest if schools willingly invest in their strength initially.

As an additional boost to team autonomy, teams ought to be involved in the scheduling and grouping of their students. Most schools with a team organization rely on the team as the scheduling variable and have developed a team based, block time schedule. In those schools it is not only desirable, but possible to offer teams the responsibility of managing the details of individual student schedules.

All of the above suggestions to promote authentic teaming are more specifically intended to provide teachers with the prerequisites necessary for establishing teaming communities. Without the basics, teaming becomes more a burden to be cast aside than a blessing to be cherished.

II. The Teaming Community

Even with the necessary prerequisites, building a teaming community requires special efforts on the part of the teachers involved. Working with others toward shared goals undoubtedly involves extensive give and take dynamics. Teachers on a team share the same students and consequently will share many of the same trials and tribulations. Likewise, they are able to share in the team's successes and watch in delight as their students grow and change. Though most of us are willing to accept the bad with the good, we are still inclined to ask, "What really makes a team work?"

Unfortunately available answers are often as complicated as the question itself and tend to lead us everywhere and thus nowhere. The list that follows is intended to provide realistic and practical avenues toward effective teaming. To simplify matters for the reader, I have described my suggestions in categories based on four broad goals for teaming. The categories are: Team Spirit, Team Communication, Team Behavior, and Team Instruction.

TEAM SPIRIT. A sense of team spirit is like a magic key which unlocks valuable doors with middle school kids. If kids feel good about their special learning communities they are more likely to feel good about their school as well. Furthermore, middle schoolers will dedicate a marked amount of personal energy to support their team peer group, so that encouraging team spirit works to encourage involvement and investment on the part of many students. There are innumerable activities which foster team spirit. Here are a few that have been successful:

- (a) *Team Field Trip*-A team must work to become a group and field trips provide a perfect opportunity for group cohesiveness. Involving student in the plans and preparing some team-wide pretrip and posttrip experience-related activities can add another dimension.
- (b) *Team Honor Roll*-Recognizing team academic achievement is a team pride booster. Posting the names of honor roll students in a common team area and even awarding special buttons marked perhaps with "I DID IT" can help kids feel proud of their team's success.
- (c) *Team Projects*-There are many community or school projects which could involve an entire team. Money raising projects for needy local groups are effective as well as ecology related collections or activities. Teams really get "fired up", as the kids say, when they produce and perform a program or play for the whole world to see. Many of these projects and others could be a part of the academics or they could be done during the special interest classes, homebase program, lunch time or any other team scheduled time.
- (d) *Team Gatherings*-Regularly scheduled team meetings where all team community members and teachers carry on a planning or ideas session captures an aspect of teaming often overlooked. The physical gathering plus the total team involvement in team affairs says to kids that the team is theirs and their participation counts.
- (e) *Team Talent*-Middle school intramural athletics is an exciting way to foster team spirit. Lots of kids can partake and the entire team provides cheering support. Some teams even have practice games in various sports to get ready for the competition. Talent shows can be another way to let the team take note of its specialness!

TEAM COMMUNICATION. Constant and effective communication is essential between the team teachers and team students and/or parents. At the opening of every school year it is advisable to set the mode by planning and executing a thorough team orientation. A team orientation serves to introduce new middle school students to the notion of a team, while acquainting all students with the team staff, schedule and general proceedings.

Individual student-team conferences are helpful throughout the year. When a child needs special guidance and support in setting academic goals for personal growth, an entire team can meet with the student to advise, guide and assist. Often a

team will write up a contract to be agreed upon by the student and all of his cooperating teachers. The contract can then meet all of the student's needs academically without presenting a conflict with another teacher's expectations or plans. The child is able to receive help from a fourway support system.

Teaming teachers can serve each other in a supportive way. In addition to meeting with shared parents, teams should meet together with parents in conferences in order to provide the parent with a multiple perspective on the child involved. Parents are receptive when several teaching adults offer the same recommendations or draw similar conclusions concerning their child.

Providing avenues for student-to-team communication is usually handled in less formal ways. Kids talk to teachers and teachers talk to kids, but nevertheless lots of good suggestions lay by the wayside. A large "Red Hot Idea Box" helps if students are encouraged to use it freely.

Finally, the team will be wearing a smile if teachers on the team feel relatively good about their team adult relations. Ideally, teams should be prepared with helpful team interaction skills, but since such staff development is a rare commodity, I would recommend that each team have some team determined goals and guidelines to help direct the teaming communication throughout the year. A team leader can often assist with this dimension of team life.

TEAM BEHAVIOR. Determining team behaviors or rules and rewarding those who comply or discouraging those who don't, can have a snowballing effect within a team. Team rules are easier to promote when they belong to the entire team. Most important, however, teams of teachers can work together to individualize discipline. What works with one child for one teacher could be used by other teacher as well.

Some teams find it successful to make a Team Citizen of the Month Contest to encourage positive behavior.

TEAM INSTRUCTION. Team teaching and teaming are different and the first should by no means be considered a prerequisite of the latter. In fact, some teachers have often shied away from teaming because they were not ready for team teaching. Totally teamed instruction is feasible in only a few middle schools. There are, however, other modifications of interdisciplinary teamed instruction which are worthy of our attention. If four teachers cannot team there is lots to be said for paired teaming where two teachers on a team share instructional plans for two academic areas or where they team teach a special interest class. It might also be possible for teaming teachers to join forces for instruction by preparing team activities for a Homebase Program. The key is that four heads are better than one and a greater variety of learning needs can be met when teachers work together.

My suggestions are not meant to provide a one-way route to better teaming. They should, however, share my reflections on teaming in a practical way. I am still left with one last thought and that is that no matter how much we want to do for kids we can only do so much. As you consider all of these suggestions, consider too that teaming is hard work and means working with others we may or may not like. It means additional time for planning and communication, and perhaps giving much more of ourselves than we may be accustomed to sharing. Ultimately though, the joys that effective teaming can yield far outweigh the "jive" we may get along the way. Since it is trying that really counts, give real teaming a *try*.

Exploration: The Middle School Music

*If a man does not
keep pace with his companions,
perhaps it is because
he hears a different drummer.*

*Let him step
to the music he hears,
however measured
or far away.*

-Henry David Thoreau

These words of Thoreau, perhaps too frequently spouted and often inappropriately quoted, nonetheless have tremendous potency in poetically expressing what is at the heart and core of the middle school. As a unique and transitional institution, it was conceived with the hope of creating schools which would bring truth to Thoreau's profound and humane thoughts, providing a real opportunity for each transescent to "step to the music he hears". This goal was derived from the knowledge that kids between the ages of 10-14 experience a veritable explosion of growth and change which is complicated by life experiences in our pluralistic and ever-changing society. Middle schoolers, even in the same classroom, present a myriad of personalities with differing interests, talents, skills, and needs. Indeed, *here*, is where diversity is truth. Here is the real challenge for the middle school and its teachers.

It's exciting to watch as middle schools across the nation meet such diversity head on, designing special interest classes, exploratory programs, independent study labs, interest-based academics, varied clubs and a whole host of combinations. Compared with the findings of a shadow study conducted in 1964, which, in observing schools for transescents, concluded that, "The learning environment lacked stimulation, the program of required subjects was not diversified and there was little provision for individual differences among pupils." The 1977 shadow study reveals marked improvement in this regard. Nevertheless, there are still middle schools, or schools so named, void of an exploratory purpose and others where the purpose is evident but

hardly actualized. If we believe that exploratory learning is especially vital to middle schoolers, that schooling, if it is to have any meaning for the kids it serves, must consider what kids want to learn as well as what they ought to learn, and that in order for the good school to model the good society it must expose kids to the richness of living and learning inherent in our modern world, then we ought to check our own schools to see if what's visible in the way of school programs matches what's invisible in the way of our beliefs.

I. Building On Beliefs

Designing a special interest or exploratory program which reflects student interests, offers variety consistent with the diversity we face and is substantial as a learning program, is a task which requires a committed and prepared faculty and staff. In some schools, implementing a fully-functioning exploratory program could call for a total reorganization of teachers and students as well as some significant scheduling changes. In the process of readying school persons for an exploratory addition, it may be helpful to review these organizational guidelines.

1. Regardless of how we organize the specifics of an exploratory curricular plan, effective exploratory programs must be included as a regularly scheduled part of the school day or week. Exploratory or special interest classes have rarely worked before or after school since only a minority of teachers and students are able to participate. Furthermore, pushing these classes outside of the regular curriculum communicates to all involved that, "These classes are not important enough for school time."

2. Many junior high schools and middle schools have elective programs which traditionally offer Unified Arts subject such as Home Economics, Music, Art, Industrial Arts and, in some cases, a foreign language. Quite often these electives are offered to kids via a wheel system, rotating certain courses to groups of students throughout the year, eventually teaching all subjects to all kids. A more complete exploratory curriculum would not only involve the student in choosing areas to explore, but it would involve academic teachers in the designing and teaching of minicourses. This approach yields increased variety which makes real choice possible and the task of satisfying students more feasible.

3. The length of your exploratory courses should support the "exploring" motif. Real exploring can only go on for so long, and difficulty will occur if the courses are carried on after interest has already peaked and declined. In determining the length, consider too, the time needed for teacher preparation and student scheduling. Six week courses every day, nine week courses three times a week, or twelve week courses every other day are examples.

4. Students tend to take special interest classes more seriously when they are held accountable for their participation. Since our purpose is to invite kids to explore, it's important to design some non-threatening means of evaluation. Pass-Fail or Excellent, Satisfactory, Unsatisfactory have been successful compromises.

5. Academic teachers who are willing to extend themselves in the instruction of exploratory courses must be assured that the courses they design and teach can be built on their strengths and talents as they respond to their students interests and needs.

Given this freedom and flexibility as well as some time to plan, most teachers find the opportunity to share an entirely new part of themselves, refreshing!

II. What Works: A Sample Program

I am actively participating in an effective exploratory program and am convinced that in a school where conditions are by no means ideal, it is significantly contributing to the production of happier kids and happier teachers. The result of hard work by all teachers involved is a rich and varied minicourse curriculum which grows and changes with our students. The school is organized in teams of approximately 160 students served by four academic teachers. In addition we are staffed with specialists (ie; Home Economics, Industrial Arts-Vocational Agriculture, Vocal Music-Piano, Instrumental Music), who serve all of the teams all day long as exploratory course teachers. The students on a team participate in exploratory activities every other day for two 42 minute periods, lasting 12 weeks. Procedurally, the program follows these steps:

1. Team teachers survey student interests, skill deficiencies and needs.
2. Unified Arts teachers and academic teachers determine what mini-courses they will teach. Brief mini-course descriptions are duplicated and distributed to teachers and students. Some course are repeated during the school year.
3. Based on the number of students and the total number of course offerings, course quotas are established so as to balance class loads.
4. Students, assisted by their advising teacher, select the two mini-courses they wish to take. The course quotas make it impossible for every child to have first choice every term, so teachers devise long-term scheduling procedures which guarantee fairness.
5. Class rosters are compiled within the team and distributed to participating teachers before the sessions begin.
6. Accidental overloads and consequent rescheduling must be resolved prior to the starting date for the new courses.
7. Once classes begin, we have made it a general ruling to discourage the "I don't like this course, can I change" syndrome.
8. The students are graded at the close of each grading period on an Excellent, Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory scale.

Teachers have demonstrated endless talent and resourcefulness in designing and teaching innovative, relevant, fun and rigorous academic courses. Many successful courses have been repeated but the list of offerings is still impressive. Here are a few examples.

1. Typing—Frequently repeated.
2. Sign-Language—Created out of student interest in our deaf students' means of communicating.
3. French—Taught by a teacher who had only a high-school background.
4. Psychology.
5. Middle Eastern Dance (Belly Dancing).
6. Joys of a Woman—Developed out of girls' questions about sex, motherhood, etc.

7. Ballet and Modern Dance—Kids love to dance and so did this particular teacher.

8. Oodles of Art—There are very few children who don't want to try art at least once.

9. Soft Summer Breezes—This teacher love to sail, so she taught kids all she knew about sailing and sailboats. They built their very own boats and took a sailing trip.

10. Creepy, Crawley Critters—Middle school kids like reptiles and amphibians—believe it or not! This was a biology class which even included some dissecting.

11. Skill Lab—Many student want to boost their Math or Reading Skills. This class was created by their request.

As you can readily see, this exploratory curriculum can defend itself against any attack that it is just frills or taking away from "basic". In fact, many parents are delighted that their 6th grader, for example, can enroll in French, Cooking, Psychology and Math Lab all in one school year.

This program is not perfect but it is working well. We are beginning to see kids who have been in hiding for some time emerge and blossom. Most important, however, is the fact that as a middle school we are building on diversity, supporting uniqueness and individuality and giving each child, perhaps his only chance, to become someone special.

Multiage Grouping: Teaching With Time On Your Side

“Grade-free grouping means that curriculum can be tailored to the individual learner and not to some prefabricated conception of a student in the 6th, 7th or 8th grade.”

Multiage grouping is a concept that continues to intrigue a growing number of middle school educators. Contrasted with our familiar chronological or grade level patterns of grouping, multiage grouping places students of varying ages and grades together for instruction. Within such a setting, students are not assigned to specific teachers, special classes or a designated piece of the curriculum by virtue of their grade level in school. Instead, students in schools with multiage grouping learn alongside fellow students from as many as two or three different grades.

While talk about the concept has invited intrigue, most middle school educators are reluctant to try it out in their home school settings. Many view nongraded grouping as a radical departure from the educational norm and shy away. Many more parents, teacher, administrators and kids have never witnessed multiage grouping at work and so find it a mystery. Since I am convinced that multiage grouping can dramatically enhance school environments and positively affect middle school kids, I am anxious to unveil its mysteries by sharing my findings and discoveries.

I. THE UNVEILING

The findings I would like to share have been intuitively and inductively drawn from live school settings. They represent my sentiments and experiences as well as those commonly acknowledged by other who have tried it and liked it. As you review the ideas presented, I invite you to imagine how multiage grouping might serve your middle school students.

Multiage grouping can alter a number of school conditions which, in turn, effect changes in dimensions of student growth. First and foremost, multiage grouping

opens doors for continuous and individual student progress. Kids are usually the first ones to notice that multiage grouping makes it officially O.K. to be different as learners and as persons. A sixth grader who is ready for Algebra is not forced to stay with sixth grade Mathematics. Similarly, the eighth grader who is struggling with multiplication and division, is not denied the needed opportunity to practice these basic math skills that normally are excluded from eighth grade math instruction. Grade-free grouping means that curriculum can be tailored to the individual learner and not to some prefabricated conception of a student in the 6th, 7th or 8th grade. Entering a school with multiage grouping, a seventh grade child will not be arbitrarily lumped with all other seventh graders as simply one of a kind. Individual needs reign supreme!

While multiage grouping inevitably encourages a more flexible approach to school curriculum and instruction in the basic skill areas, it can also facilitate upward vertical mobility in dimensions of social perception. Students in multiage grouped classes are exposed to an enriching and broadening array of modeling alternatives. Peer-conscious middle schoolers who encounter challenging models of cognitive and moral reasoning are increasingly likely to be stimulated towards greater intellectual and moral growth. With multiage grouping, this growth is accomplished by supportive peer-advising and peer-teaching behaviors which readily surface and sustain themselves. Eighth graders no longer carry the big stick on campus. In fact, they often solicit the help of students much younger than themselves. Over a period of several years, many close friendships develop across once dividing grade lines. These relationships help our kids cope with the changes and traumas of transience. The early maturing sixth grader or late maturing eighth grader can easily find experienced support.

While the merits discussed thus far illustrate the impact of multiage grouping on facets of student growth, its real power, I believe, rests with its undeniable capacity to alter dramatically the middle school students' relationship with his teachers, his peers and his school. In schools where students are assigned to a team, multiage grouping can allow those students to spend perhaps three to four years together with the same group of teachers and peers. As teachers and students invest years of their lives in each other, powerful human bonds are formed and sealed. A multiage grouped team of students and teachers then can emerge as a caring community where kids find a sense of permanence, stability and "family" they so desperately need in order to grow. Most encouraging though is the observation that middle school kids behave differently towards teachers and schools that have shared a part of their lives over time. Students are less interested in causing trouble, so discipline problems are fewer and less severe. Since multiage grouping implies that students return to the same team of teachers each year, much of the first part of the school year is preserved for valuable instructional time when it is normally devoted to rules, regulations and remedies. Even the final days of school are better since no one wants to seriously jeopardize the next year's relationship. Multiage grouping strengthens relationships between teachers and kids. The dividends are more than worth the investment!

I have drawn attention to broad areas of impact, however, there are other more specific outcomes which reveal additional merits of multiage grouping.

(1) There has been a noticeable decrease in vandalism where multiage grouping is

at work. The continued relationships built with parents and families over the years may account for this.

(2) Teachers know students from year to year and thus are more efficient and thorough in diagnosing and treating unique learning needs.

(3) Students are often more responsible for themselves and others. The mingling and sharing over a period of time encourages peer and individual responsibility.

(4) When 6th, 7th, and 8th graders are on the same team and in the same classes, retained students do not stand out. They are, like others still "on the road".

II. PRECAUTIONS FOR PLANNERS

If multiage grouping sounds right for your school setting and you are serious about considering instituting it in your school, some precautions to consider in planning your moves toward change are offered below:

1st. Teachers, kids and parents must be well informed about the concept and how it works.

2nd. Curriculum plans must be adjusted so that every subject has a visible scope or sequence useful in assessing and promoting continuous learning progress.

3rd. A trial period of at least a year and one half should be allowed before any evaluations are made.

4th. Teachers may desire assistance in planning for multiaged group instruction. Such help may be critical to the success of this arrangement.

Multiage grouping makes a tremendous difference in schools and can have a powerful impact on the lives of the children we teach. Take time to give time!

Part III

**Teaching:
The Heart of Success**



Adviser-Advisee Activities: My Top Ten

In an earlier piece I strongly advocated affective education for middle school kids, outlining what I believed to be a practical and effective program. Since that time, I have become increasingly conscious of a need to follow my broad program suggestions with something for the teacher-reader who is face to face with kids in a currently surviving Advisor-Advisee program.

This column is an effort to further bridge the gap from theory into practice by offering a model of affective education in action. Too many teachers are living with the threatening and inhibiting notion that affective education only happens when highly structured "valuing" sessions are conducted with complicated counseling techniques. Though affective teaching requires careful planning and practice, it relies as well on many basic and accessible resources. If affective education is to become an integral part of our educational programs for transescents then it is precisely these basic resources which we need to tap.

A SOLID FOUNDATION

An outstanding breakthrough for the middle school has been its renewed commitment to what has been referred to as the 4th R, Relationships. In schools where Advisor-Advisee or comparable programs are working, teachers and students are given a time and place to grow in caring. The opportunity to build relationships and the process of building them can yield the solid foundation which I believe precedes real affective growth for kids. There are endless 4th R builders for teachers and kids. The following brief list dicusses practices which have had a powerful impact on relationships established with and among my students. In particular, these practices transform everyday social experiences into tools for affective education.

4th R Builders—What's worked

The Advisor-Advisee unit ought to be like a family at school. Consequently, I believe it's important for the unit to have a special identity which lets kids know they belong to a supportive and caring peer group. It is within this family structure that strong and nurturing relationships are fostered. The five suggestions which follow will help to achieve this identity.

1. *Photo Album.* Almost every family has a photo album which symbolizes togetherness and continued sharing. To promote groupness, have your Advisor-Advisee group compile an album of personal photographs collected throughout the school year. The album has visible permanence which encourages group pride and strengthens group identity.

2. *Food With Friends*. The simple act of sharing a meal prepared together tells kids that this group has experiences beyond the regular class and devotes more time to the process of caring. Cooking breakfast, sharing hot chocolate and donuts, eating lunch on the lawn or even a pot luck supper all work as relationship-building practices.

3. *A Class Pet*. Kids love animals and will involve themselves extensively in the sharing and caring for a pet. The recent addition of a Guinea pig to my own Advisor-Advisee group has contributed considerably to group cooperation and mutual support. They all care about the Guinea pig and care about each other as they work together for its well-being.

4. *Holiday Sharing*. The elementary school notion of Xmas in the classroom has relevance for middle schoolers as well. Though I chose Xmas as an example, any joint project which gives special meaning to a holiday and is shared by the group can be a potent 4th R builder. I am convinced that too frequently we shy away from what may appear noneducational objectives.

5. *Happy Birthday! You're Special to Us*. Birthdays identify each of us as unique and yet join us in their common occurrence. Advisee students can experience a sense of personal worth while their day is celebrated. Too, they find an additional sense of group cohesiveness as they outwardly dedicate their caring to another member of what is gradually growing to be special group.

These simple practices are, I think, desirable and needed components of an affective education class for kids and are as significant as the more traditionally conceived affective activities.

MY TOP TEN AFFECTIVE ACTIVITIES

It is a difficult task to predict what sort of affective activities will be successful with middle school kids. The following list describes teacher-tried, hand-me-down activities which I have collected or created, and modified during a three-year experience with an Advisor-Advisee responsibility. Their appeal and consequent success has qualified them as my top-ten. Hopefully, they will be for you and your students as well.

1. Activity—"I FEEL GOOD ABOUT..." (Allow 25 minutes)

Why? Sharing feelings can often seem so contrived and forced, but it is nonetheless an important experience in growing. This activity lets kids share comfortably while helping them to look at their uniqueness and the uniqueness of others.

How?

1. Seat your kids in a circle near a wall or blackboard.

2. Tape a very large sheet of plain white paper on the wall or board. Have plenty of colored markers ready and one ink pad.

3. Tell the kids that you are going to talk about differences. Let them name ways we are different. Many will suggest the obvious (i.e., eyes, names, families, etc.). Explain that our fingerprints are also a unique and identifying physical feature. Each of our thumbprints is a *special* mark like no other! Add that our felings on the inside are also different from others.

4. Now, you set the pattern to follow. Stamp you own thumbprint on the paper. Then, write "I feel good about _____ and fill in the blank according to your feelings. Write your words around your fingerprint.

5. Kids will be eager to try. Let them, one at a time, until *everyone* has his mark and feelings on the paper.

6. Read over and admire the final work. Help students notice their uniqueness as well as the uniqueness of others. This activity could begin a whole unit on "Differences and Likenesses".

II. Activity—"MASTER-SLAVE" (Allow two 30-minute time blocks)

Why? Middle Schoolers have difficulty observing and checking their own behavior. This activity gives them a chance to be controlled and to control, while experiencing all the levels in-between.

Part A—How?

1. Tell the students that you want them to be robots while you play the role of the Master Computer.

2. For one minute you assume control, dictating just what your student-robots will do.

3. Next, lift some control and explain that they are no longer robots but they are free to do what they want for one minute as long as they have arms locked with two other people.

4. Then, tell them they are free for one minute as long as they have hands behind their necks, with the use of only one foot.

5. Finally, let students, with your reasonable but necessary limits, be free, totally, for one minute. Most do not know what to do first.

6. Return to robots.

7. Follow this up with a sharing session where students tell what they felt during the activity.

Part B—How?

1. Have students select partners. Let them act out Master-Slave roles with the partners for assigned time periods.

2. Follow-up with talk session.

III. Activity—"ME AND MY SHADOW"

Why? This activity lets kids talk about themselves without talking at all. It is a good ice-breaker with a *new* group. It also lets kids take a new look at themselves.

How?

1. You will need one overhead projector, lots of white drawing paper, black crayons, old magazines, scissors and paste.

2. Make a silhouette of every child's facial profile or let the kids do each other.

3. Each child cuts out his own profile.

4. As the teacher, you can choose from the following variations. All have worked well for me.

(a) Make an "all about me" collage right on the silhouette.

(b) Divide the profile into four quarters and have students write or draw or collage the areas as follows: (1) my family, (2) my favorite, (3) my hopes and dreams and (4) my fears.

(c) Have them write a "Who am I" riddle on their profiles. Then have their peers "guess who?"

IV. Activity—"IT'S ME FOR A DAY" (Allow 10-15 minutes)

Why? Middle schoolers, like all of us, have the need to be recognized as special. To affirm their specialness, let each child, once a week, be interviewed by his peer advisee students. This activity may require that a feeling of mutual respect has been established.

How?

Find a special stool or chair. Randomly select one student to begin. Tell the students that you hope that they can learn more about each other from personal interviews. Let the person who's "on the seat" know he can answer or pass on any question.

Your role is to insure that kids participate by asking questions and to keep the rules intact. It's helpful to have a list of sample questions the kids could ask.

There's not much to it in terms of preparation, but the kids will take it away.

V. Activity—"MAKING A GROUP"

Why? Almost all affective activities require good communication skills - listening, actively sharing, and opening up. Kids need lots of practice and, I have found, lots of structure.

If you set up a special way of meeting as a group, all activities will be greatly enhanced.

How?

1. Set aside special times for authentic group talk sessions.
2. Insist on sitting in a circle so everyone is face-to-face and no one is excluded. You may want to try one outer and one inner circle - try both.
3. Pick any topic to talk about, but make it relatively simple and yet broad enough to invite even the quiet ones to add on.
4. Then, set the key pattern. Tell kids you want them to use a special formula when they talk with each other in groups. The formula says that they are to listen so hard that whenever you "stop" the session, they should be able to repeat not only what the last person said, but what has gone on during the session. Kids will do it, if you do it and insist they do. They go for nifty formulas.

Reinforce this "active listening" through all sessions. Stop and repeat as often as you need, to get kids to become involved and more attentive to each other.

VI. Activity—"GOT IT TOGETHER?"

Why? Kids are often torn apart by decisions. They realize that sometimes their stomach wars with their mind, heart, body and so on. This activity helps them share that realization, while acknowledging the process of decision-making and the satisfaction good decisions can yield.

How?

Make an oak tag doll model 2-3 feet tall. Use magic markers to divide the whole doll into puzzle pieces.

Steps:

1. Sit in circle with doll in the middle.

2. Explain that this doll needs to become someone. Let the kids name it.
3. Then, tell the kids that *so & so* has, like all of us, many parts of his/her personality with many different needs. Label the parts-stomach, feelings, thoughts, etc.
4. Make up some hypothetical decision eliciting situation. Example: The girl is fat and wants to lose weight. She knows what she should do, but her stomach tells her something different. She is torn. Pull the puzzle pieces of mind and stomach apart.
5. Let the kids do the same with stories you jot down on index cards or theirs they share.
6. Close by reiterating what has been discussed. Share related personal feelings and experiences if kids are willing.

VII. Activity-"CHARACTER CARDS"

Why? Role playing is a relatively non-threatening and fun way for middle school kids to share and/or release feelings and personality traits they might otherwise be unable or unwilling to share. It allows them opportunity to test themselves in new roles and situations. The result is usually valuable self-discovery of personal strengths and weaknesses, interests or concerns.

There are many alternative role playing activities from which to choose. The two samples below offer flexibility and a certain degree of insured success.

How? Allow one 30 minute session and one 15 minute session.

Step 1. On about twenty-five 3 x 5 index cards, write in large letters, different caricatures such as:

snob	shy one	leader
bully	teacher's pet	poor sport
show-off	book worm	big mouth

Explain to the group that you will be acting out different kinds of people.

Step 2. (a) Put the cards in a box or hat, face down.

(b) Students select a card one at a time to role play.

Step 3. The role player is to convey his character to the audience, trying to enable the group to guess what kind of person he's pretending to be.

Step 4. The one who correctly guesses selects the next card.

Step 5. Stop either after each one or after several to discuss the characters portrayed. Ask students to share experiences of when they have encountered the various characters in real life. Be sure to have experiences remain anonymous or the discussion session could degenerate to a gossip session.

VIII. Activity-"CAREER LABELS" (Allow two 30-minute sessions)

How?

Step 1. Introduce the activity by asking the group to name as many different careers as possible. Write these on the board or large white tablet.

Step 2. On sticky labels, write (before or after Step 1), the names of many different careers.

Step 3. Tell the group that this activity requires pairs to work together within the whole group.

Step 4. Ask for two volunteers to start off. One, without knowing what the label reads, has a career stuck on his forehead. The other's task is to pantomime that career so as to reveal the career to the label-wearer.

Step 5. Time-out is given to discuss that career, and whether or not it's something of interest to either partner.

Step 6. The second person in the pair wears a label. The activity is repeated in the same manner for other class members.

IX. Activity—"PUFF THE MAGIC DRAGON"

Why? This activity is to open a series of activities on fears. Each of us is fearful of something, someone, or both. Discussing fears helps kids realize personal fears, grow in an understanding of them, and thus move in the direction of overcoming them.

How?

Step 1. Tell the children that many, many years ago, especially in stories, dragons were symbols of danger and were feared by almost all. In dragon stories (read one if you find one that's short and suitable) the brave prince triumphs by slaying the dragon with his mighty sword.

Step 2. Have kids talk about things that they are afraid of—heights, snakes, etc. If they have trouble getting started, help them. If they still have trouble, skip Step 2 and proceed to Step 3.

Step 3. Have white paper, one sheet for each child, crayons, pieces of colored paper and magazines to cut. Let kids make their "dragon of fears" including one or more fears. They can draw and color or cut and paste.

Step 4. Follow this art-like activity with a more involved Step 2 with kids explaining and discussing their "Dragons of Fear". Share yours, too!

X. Activity—"FRIENDSHIP"

Why? Middle school kids are deeply involved with their peers and concerned with friendship. Valentine's Day often lends itself to this activity.

How?

Part I.

Step 1. On ditto paper make a large heart, decorate with fringe. Divide the heart into four quadrants and write the following in each of the quadrants:

1st. A friend is...

2nd. I was friendly when I...

3rd. Someone was friendly to me when they...

4th. Friendship is...

Step 2. Let the kids write in their ideas on a heart of their own.

Step 3. Collect them and mix up. Read aloud as many as necessary to elicit interest and continued involvement. Ask for comments.

Part II.

Tell the students you are going to take their ideas about friendship and make a friendship book. Have one or two students write the responses on ditto masters, including the author's name. These can be run-off, cut, and collated by the kids. Prepare a cover.

...These are some activities that have worked for me as I have tried to give substance to our middle school commitment to affective education. Hope they will be useful to you.

Cooperative Teaching: An Inside Look

I. COOPERATIVE TEACHING: A SECOND LOOK

It's exciting to watch as middle schools across the country bring students and teachers together into smaller, more personal communities for teaching and learning. It's a little discouraging to note, however, that while groups of teachers and students are indeed being transformed into clearly defined and interpersonally involved communities, participation in authentic team teaching is not a simultaneously occurring phenomenon. Why not? Many middle schools have the characters set to go on a relatively stable stage for teaming. Their teachers and students have a common group identity, share some common part of the school campus, and often follow a common daily schedule. Unfortunately, these same middle schools are often unable to provide teaming teachers with the supportive props which facilitate successful teamed instruction, such as a common planning period, connective classrooms or neighboring classrooms, a flexible block schedule and training in those special skills of team planning and team teaching. As a result, teaming teachers may work hard to create closeknit learning communities but withdraw from invitations to team teach. So it is that teaming teachers often share little more than the same kids, reserving the sharing of lesson plans, teaching talents and subject area expertises for teaching conditions more suitable.

In a personal effort to promote and preserve team teaching as a viable instructional tool for middle school teachers. I would like to offer an illustration of how two teachers participated in cooperative teaching even without the props. I hope that the description of a real case as well as my analysis will offer impetus and insight to teachers eager to team teach.

II. THE RAW FACTS

For most of a school year I taught Reading to about 150 students on a team. As one of four team members I shared the same group of students, the same basic schedule, the same hallway but never the same lesson plans. With lots of students reading below grade level, and multiple groups, I found the constant challenge of providing effective reading instruction life-related, difficult and demanding. Moreover, I became concerned about the artificial separation of language arts and reading and its obvious message to the kids. Fortunately, the Language Arts teacher on my team shared these same concerns and so we decided to open our doors to an experiment in cooperative teaching.

Before embarking on this exciting endeavor, we carefully examined our possibilities and limitations. Logistically, cooperative teaching was possible since during four forty-two minute class periods we both taught either Language Arts or Reading to various class combinations of the same students. Our classrooms were connected by a once-blocked doorway so that we could work together with collected groups of sixty students increasing our teaching possibilities.

Several limiting factors had to be considered. Since students on the team followed varying schedules according to their ability group placement in Reading and Math, our combined group of sixty had to be totally regrouped according to our instructional plan. This regrouping had to elicit the necessary changes without disturbing the basic team schedule. For example, every forty-two minutes our students changed classes. This was one variable we could not change. Some students because of their particular class schedule stayed with us for two consecutive periods while others came for one period, left and returned at a later time. Within this framework we designed and executed a teamed unit.

III. "MAN IN FLIGHT": A JOINT EFFORT

This interdisciplinary unit was created in stages. A brief description of each stage should provide a step by step guide for teachers planning such a unit.

Stage 1—What to Teach?

After brainstorming for several weeks, we compiled a list of learning objectives in Language Arts and Reading. The objectives touched on letter writing, job application, reading comprehension, vocabulary development, following directions, creative writing and outlining. Since our students had repeatedly expressed an interest in airplanes, flying and flight, we decided to teach these skills through a thematic unit called, "Man In Flight". Clearly, this theme had possibilities for literature, writing, vocabulary, history, science, math and a whole wealth of communication skills.

Stage 2—Gathering Resources

Gathering resources was more stimulating and efficient when working together. We were amazed at the resources we were able to tap. Some examples include: local travel agents, airlines, the local airport, NASA, the U.S. Air Force, pilots and other flight specialists in our community. In addition, all reading textbooks were scoured for flight related stories and classified according to determined readability levels. Too, our school library supplied books and media related to our Unit's theme.

Stage 3—Designing Learning Activities

In order to fully utilize all our resources we decided to use a centers approach individualizing our learning activities according to reading levels, specified by a color coding system. The unit had ten learning stations and one learning packet for all students to experience. Activities in each of the stations varied according to levels with some opportunity for variety according to student interest or learning style.

Six of the centers were set up in one classroom and the remaining were set up in the other. The centers varied according to the skill objectives and two were open-ended. As an example, the center which dealt with following directions was called "Fly Your Own Thing". Students were to build whirly birds, pinwheels and paper

airplanes. Some students constructed model airplanes. Following directions was critical to success and success was evaluated in our paper airplane flying contest which was held periodically throughout the unit.

Stage 4—Setting Up

Before the unit could begin we had to pave the road for its success. Many centers had activities which required students to preview film strips or listen to tapes. Accordingly we built two previewing corners equipped with headphones, tape recorders and film strip previewers. An additional preventative provision was aimed at record keeping and evaluation. Each student was given one folder for the unit with a special checklist of all the center activities. All work completed would be kept in these folders and each of us would evaluate work done on those centers we specifically designed. For special student cases, we deleted certain centers or included other options not generally available. These would be noted at the bottom of a student's checklist. We kept these folders in two large boxes so that A-M were in one classroom and the remaining N-Z were in the other. Finally we agreed upon certain guidelines for student behavior and teacher behavior during the unit.

Stage 5—Orientation

We devoted two full days to orientation. Students were introduced to the centers, and the logistics of our unit. Behavior standards were explored, agreed upon and established.

Stage 6—Blast Off!

The unit lasted for six weeks. Each week there was a combination of individual work time, small group time and large group time.

Throughout the six weeks, situational meetings were necessary. At one point we found it necessary to make a motivational chart for the drifters who couldn't get started. This was a visible chart for students to refer to regarding their progress. We also designated peer-teaching pairs to help those needing more structure than the unit provided.

IV. WHAT WE DISCOVERED

In spite of the frustrations along the way, the unit's success was overwhelming. We happily discovered:

1. Students who were turned off to Language Arts and Reading were newly motivated and worked enthusiastically.
2. Students engaged in self-initiated projects related to but not required by the units' activities (ie; a small group designed and built an airport for the future.)
3. Students acknowledged the application of skills to practical situations, (ie; the need to read directions carefully before filling out a job application).
4. As a result of increased student interest, all but a few students received higher grades. They were pleased with their success.
5. Teaching became more exciting as we shared our successes and failures with each other. The experience encouraged each of us to examine our own teaching strengths and weaknesses.
6. The nature of the unit allowed for student freedom but fostered student self-discipline.

7. With two of us at work, student needs were met more effectively. One could work with a small group while the other facilitated those working individually.
8. The unit involved the Math and Science teachers on our team. They enriched the unit as visiting instructors and taught related large group lessons.
9. Those skills selected to be taught were successfully taught as suggested by a final post-test evaluation.
10. Students learned to work together democratically and were pleased to see their teachers cooperating for their welfare.
11. Students were able to work continuously on one integrated learning experience and felt they accomplished more as a result.

Team teaching can bring new life and vitality into your teaching. If you feel courageous here is a final list of helpful suggestions:

1. Start small. Perhaps two team members can experiment before all four members become involved.
2. Assess your logistical limitations. Be realistic.
3. Select a theme according to student interests.
4. Work out teaching roles and personal expectations before you start.
5. Hold frequent on-the-spot problem solving meetings during the unit.
6. Evaluate your product! Get student feedback.
7. Don't give up the unit.

Though my account is just one example, I hope you are inspired to reconsider cooperative teaching as a valuable instructional tool. Perhaps our individual teaching efforts will draw support so that all middle school students may someday have the exciting kind of learning experience offered through team teaching.

*NOTE: The Language Arts teacher, Carla Hoy, is currently teaching at Lincoln Middle School in Gainesville, Florida.

Instructional Priorities: Four for the Road

A SEARCH FOR ANSWERS—INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Do these teaching problems sound familiar?

- student apathy
- no paper, no pencil
- non-academic chatter
- too much unchallenged energy
- teacher dismay, burnout
- disorder, tension
- quantity of work vs. quality of work
- "I lost my work" syndrome

While many more exist, these problems plague us all. I do not propose to have individual solutions to each of the problems listed. Instead, I would like to make suggestions which are intended to work synergistically, yielding guidelines for the creation of classrooms with fewer problems.

Every year when the summer days end and a collage of school sounds fill the quiet and sedate halls of middle schools across the country, empty desks and chairs will be animated once again by many anxious faces that are looking forward to the challenge of another year. Whenever I envision those faces, with all of their energy and anticipation, I find myself enrapt in serious and enthusiastic reflection, wanting to capsuleize what I have discovered to be some of the most important guiding principles of middle school instruction. In observing my own teaching successes and failures, I have come to understand what seems to make my classroom work. I have concluded that there are four priorities that play a vital role in effective middle school instruction. Certainly there are many other variables which contribute to our effectiveness. These are just my "four for the road".

Teacher Contact

Middle school teachers are literally 'caught in the middle' when it comes to classroom instruction. They have the unique challenge of juggling and balancing at least these two key middle school instructional elements: (1) meeting diversified individual student needs and; (2) maintaining adequate teacher-contact. While these two elements are not contradictory, they're not always complimentary and even the wary instructor occasionally gets trapped. Typically, the trap involves the teacher who works too hard to provide students with what might be called individualized or

ability grouped instruction, where a single teacher must manage three, four or five different instructional groups in one class period. Inevitably in this scenario, despite a teacher's genuine efforts to make contact with all kids, many more students find themselves in the company of paper, pencil and desk, without adult direction, coaching or support for more than 50% of their class time. I am convinced that while we must acknowledge differences in student ability, we shouldn't let it interfere with giving kids the heavy dosage of teacher-contact they need. Particularly, I am advocating the increased use of teacher-directed instruction, (i.e. lecture, demonstration, group discussion, etc.), especially when our intentions involve teaching basic skills.

In addition to support from recent research, I have concluded that our face-to-face teaching, our on-the-spot modeling, and our direct involvement in the teaching-learning process have a power in promoting effective middle school instruction that far outweighs any approach where kids must go it alone. When it comes to learning the basics, most middle school learners may not be as ready, willing or equipped to learn on their own as we might like to believe. If left to do so they might find frustration and failure. You may find more off-task behavior, apathy and a host of other problems.

Naturally, the way you make yourself available is critical to success. Increasing the dosage of you does not mean talking to your class for the entire period. It does mean—

(1) Talking to your class as an entire group daily for at least five minutes either in a coaching or instructional way;

(2) Holding class biweekly meetings for the discussion of classrooms problems, interests, concerns or subject matter;

(3) Never working on paperwork that is not immediately related to the teaching task at hand;

(4) Never dividing your time so extensively that no one gets enough of you;

(5) Never succumbing to any prescribed instructional system which forces you out of the picture!

Movement

Middle school kids need frequent opportunities to move around for one of two reasons. Either they are listless and need to be revitalized or they are electric and need an outlet. In either case, the fact remains that if middle school students are required to sit still for more than 20 minutes, they won't. Somehow, they will find a way to move, and it probably won't be productive.

There are two immediate solutions. First, you can plan for movement breaks. Second, you can design your lessons so that movement is built in. It seems to me the latter is preferable since it suggests that the nature of our instruction would coincide with the nature of our learner. As an example, after conducting a whole class lesson on following oral and written directions, my students were to construct several objects such as whirlybirds, pinwheels, paper aeroplane darts, and helicopters. Following a very active period of construction, the students and I ventured outside to test-fly our products. Notice that this was not a neat and noiseless activity, but if we are to provide middle school kids with the kind of instruction they require, then we may have to dispel the myth that noisy classrooms are bad classrooms. Good noise which

reflects productive activity and movement may indicate a healthy middle school classroom.

Peer Helping

Peers take precedence in the lives of transescents. Even quiet and shy kids long for peer support and companionship. Almost every middle schooler has or is a shadow. In that simple truth, rests a powerful tool for classroom teachers. This year, I have witnessed the saving of school lives by the use of peer helping. While middle schoolers may not be ready to go it alone, they can handle independence when there's more of you and then someone else to take up where you leave off. Sometimes you can successfully form peer helping teams and sometimes they form themselves. What matters most is that students receive additional assistance in understanding and clarifying their learning tasks, support in following through, help in maintaining attention, and companionship. For some of my students, just knowing it was okay to help someone else was a novel experience. Once this form is established, "real helping" can flourish. One interesting off-shoot is that increased opportunities for peer helping seems to decrease the need for physical movement. In balance with adequate teacher contact and student movement, peer helping adds a cooperative dimension to an otherwise individualized and possibly competitive classroom.

Beyond The Teacher

While I'm advocating more of you, I'm undoubtedly committed to the belief that a very special kind of learning occurs when kids discover what *they do know*, instead of what they don't know. As Ned O'Gorman explained, "A child needs to know what he can do, not what he cannot do." It's very easy for good teachers to become preoccupied with what kids need to know. But, when it's time to review, reteach, enrich, practice or just motivate, teachers have got to let loose. Instructional strategies such as learning centers, unipacs, independent study, and contracts are constructive ways to let loose. These strategies do not require full-time teacher contact. They offer students the needed chance to try out what they know in new and different ways. Combined with lots of your direct attention, frequent movement, and assistance from peers, independent learning experiences can be the icing on the cake.

CLOSING

There is no way to package my suggestions in the form of a "good classroom recipe." As broad goals, however, these suggestions could shape our instructional intentions, adding new dimensions to our classroom teaching. I have been convinced that teacher contact, physical movement, peer helping and independent opportunities have made the greatest contributions to my teaching successes. If we can acknowledge these four factors as priorities and arrange them in harmony, I believe we can begin to facilitate healthier, more productive middle school classrooms.

Self-directed Learning: Motivating Methods

James inquired, "I thought: learning is what you do for me while I am at school. You mean that's something I am supposed to do?" After almost eight years of schooling, James' notion that school is a place where he's supposed to sit back and take it all in, has yet to be challenged. He appears to be comfortably numb, convinced that what he's learning are not his concerns at all. He is outwardly surviving with his bag of tricks, (i.e., good grades, asking only the right questions, following directions, etc.), guaranteed to bring him school success, but he is inwardly dying a slow death guaranteed to make participatory learning and living both painful and defeating. Unfortunately, James is not an isolated case. He exemplifies the learning attitudes and behaviors of a significant proportion of his peers and our students. Middle schools, and particularly middle school teachers, have a frightfully critical yet unique opportunity to grab hold of James, pull him out of his seat, and set him on the road to becoming a participatory and involved leader.

Indeed, there are children who may never care about what they are learning and why, but there are so many more who, if given a chance to become involved, will begin to seek learning and growing experiences independent of our injunctions and demands. Now, when middle school education can have a mission, it ought to have one it needs. It needs, it seems to me, to focus its energies on bringing our children front and center, freeing them as persons and learners from the numbness which enrapt them, reviving a lost belief in themselves as contributing, capable, self-initiated and successful human beings, nurturing and supporting them as they struggle to gain independence and strength, and last, convincing them by the way we teach that learning and living are indeed their concerns.

What can we do in the most practical sense to accomplish such an overwhelming mission? How can we provide learning programs which will get James out of his seat and into his learning experiences?

I. A. Personalizing Plan

James is not going to become involved and self-directed until we let him. I believe the way we teach suggests to kids the way we want them to learn. Consequently, the program plans and instructional strategies we select have implications far beyond that of suitability to instructional objectives, the age group and/or ability level to be taught.

In my experimenting with various instructional plans, I have discovered that kids do in fact function with a greater degree of self-direction and independence when the following precepts are true:

1. Students know that what they are learning was especially designed for and tailored to their learning needs.
2. Students are free to make significant choices regardless of what they learn and how they learn it.
3. Students understand the goals and objectives implicit in their learning activities.
4. Students participate in the evaluation of their work and in the charting of their individual progress.
5. Students believe that the achievement of desired learning objectives and self-witnessed personal improvement are more highly valued than merely completing assigned work.
6. Students pace themselves in the completion of their learning tasks.
7. Students are provided with as many success experiences as possible in order to encourage a sense of personal worth so vital to a child's willingness to learn on his own.
8. Students have the opportunity to show and tell their learnings, enabling them to contribute as a learner to their larger peer community.

Establishing these stated conditions requires a special kind of instructional organization. Through trial and error, I have formulated a ten-step guide towards the development of Personalized Learning. In addition to identifying key planning and implementing procedures, this ten-step approach draws attention to elements which are basic to any self-directed instructional program. Here they are:

- Step 1* Discover through assessment, the learning needs, styles and interests of your students. This may require administering specific and formal diagnostic tests as well as inventories and additional less formal but equally disclosing indicators.
- Step 2* Determine the instructional objectives to be taught. You may need to adhere to a given curriculum guide or you may have the freedom and need to write your own. In either case, a scope and sequence of continuous progress learning skills is most desirable.
- Step 3* If necessary, retest in a pre-test fashion on the specific objectives to be taught for some designated, but relative, time period.
- Step 4* Develop class profiles which illustrate students' strengths and weaknesses within a given class. Then identify common learning needs which exist among class members, while acknowledging outstanding individual cases which will require special attention.
- Step 5* Establish a plan for the organization of students and teacher. Learning groups may be established from the profile results.
- Step 6* Prepare leveled, self-instructional, self-checking, self-pacing learning materials to accompany teacher directed lesson plans.
- Step 7* Design a schedule for students which facilitates efficient use of available materials, most effective use of teacher-time and balance in the child's learning program.

- Step 8* Prepare and orient students for a new approach to learning. Start by giving each child a personal folder, a copy of his or her personal profile, a weekly, daily, or monthly schedule and some individual progress plotting checklists. A personalized program tends to rely on effective individualizing instructional strategies such as learning stations, unipacs, contracts, and independent study plans. Students must know exactly how to work with each instructional material to be used. This initial preparation will avoid the danger of devoting more facilitation time to giving directions than providing real help.
- Step 9* Once instruction begins, your role as a teacher is critical to the success of your program. Beyond your role as a teller and a tester, you become the loving, supportive, motivating, adult resource-guide.
- Step 10* Evaluate students' work with their assistance. Record evaluations and set up individual conferences if possible. Test or assess the students' mastery of learning objectives. Then, ready the kids for new learning tasks.

These ten steps are not intended to provide you with a ready-made unit for instruction. It is my hope that this suggested planning approach will enable you to recritique and reconstruct your present learning programs so they will more fully realize the goals inherent in self-directed learning.

II. A Learning Center Approach: One Way

Though several key instructional strategies work to develop self-directedness, I have witnessed real change in the learning attitudes and behavior of my kids when I used the ten step plan, acknowledged the necessary precepts discussed earlier, and employed what could be called a learning center approach. A learning center has been classically defined as an area of the classroom devoted to the structured study of a special topic or skill. As a learning tool it contains visibly stated objectives, a pre-test, varied, leveled, and self-checking activities, a post-test plus additional 'quest' activities for the speed demon kids. When centers are properly constructed, they can serve to teach, reinforce and enrich in a particular skill area. Most important though, they can help children learn how to learn. As children find and follow the center's directions, process and select activities, and check and record their progress, they take a giant step forward as independent learners.

In instructing approximately 180 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students in library reference skills (i.e., the atlas, almanacs, encyclopedia, biographical dictionaries, etc.), I have discovered that students responded in time, with increased self-direction when using learning centers. For this particular unit, I designed fourteen learning centers, each covering one or two determined objectives. The glaring pre-test results indicated that all but a small, select group needed instruction in all the centers. Consequently, I divided each class into half-groups of about sixteen students and set up seven centers in both the classroom and our media center for almost all students to complete. Students could work through these centers with minimal teacher help. As they completed a given center, their mastery of that center's skill was tested. Mastering a skill became a pass to another center. The children paced themselves, learning to listen to their own rhythms as learners. Those students who finished earlier than others were given a unipac, an additional individualizing tool, on the Card

Catalogue and Dewey Decimal System. Meanwhile, the other students would continue with the original centers until they finished. All students found success! It is important to note here that the unit also included large and small group lessons, textbook work and films.

At the close of the unit, I observed marked strides in the students' abilities to organize and utilize class time; to find out what they are supposed to learn and how they will learn it; to evaluate and critique their own progress; and to take initiative in suggesting areas for their future study.

The learning center approach is only one way which can work to promote self-directed learning. It does, however, as a means to our end, deserve consideration. Suitable instructional strategies set within a personalized program and coupled with teacher love, support and involvement might convince James that learning is his business.

III. A Note To Middle Schools

In addition to the teacher's efforts to personalize learning in the classroom, I believe special interests or exploratory programs on a school-wide level, should be considered essentials in our attempt to get James involved and self-directed. Specifically, exploratory programs which let students determine a significant part of their personal curriculum, could powerfully transform a child's notions about school and learning. Perhaps for the first time in his career as a student, a child can choose to study something which interests him. His role as a student begins to change from passive to active. That change is in fact the key which unlocks the door to self-motivated and self-directed learning.

As teachers and middle school educators, there is much we can do to open doors, reaching out, giving kids a chance to really participate in learning. With personalized learning programs, I believe James might turn around someday soon and say, "Hey, learning is what I do for *me* while I am at school and boy am I glad I found out!"

Putting a Reading Program to Work

This year many more middle level schools will join the others who have reacknowledged the need for superior and substantial *developmental* reading programs. While some middle schools may experiment with alternative models, most middle schools have responded to the significant number of handicapped, reluctant or retarded readers by adding Reading as an additional academic subject to be taught schoolwide through a basal reading program. This inevitable step has most certainly given credibility and direction to newly formed reading programs in the middle grades.

Problems naturally accompany the inclusion of a developmental reading program in the middle school setting. In particular, those teachers assigned the task of putting the basal program to work in classrooms frequently find the conditions frustrating, overwhelming, and, at times, chaotic. Regardless of varying school conditions, almost all middle school developmental reading teachers who are using a basal series must contend with:

- 1) multiple reading groups requiring teacher directed instruction;
- 2) the limitations of a 40-50 minute reading period;
- 3) the paperwork preparation required when teaching multiple groups; and
- 4) the need for remediation and enrichment to insure balance in the program.

**Appreciation is expressed to the Reading teachers at Lincoln Middle School, Gainesville, Florida for their assistance in providing ideas and activities.*

What can be done to help the reading teacher manage these diverse factors? What system can be implemented that is both manageable and professionally sound?

I. A Classroom System

I would like to propose a classroom instructional system that really works. Before outlining the details of the system, I would offer one general suggestion that ought to be heeded. If the individual reading teacher is to survive, an effective in-school peer support group must be established. Whether it is in the shape of a department, team or vertical committee, reading teachers using a basal series must be able and willing to draw support and assistance from others. With that notion in mind, let us turn to the system.

It is critical that an approach used in classroom reading instruction incorporate the instructional steps of a directed reading lesson. These steps are usually described

in any basal reading teacher's manual. While terminology varies slightly among series, the steps are essentially as follows: (1) Motivation, background, vocabulary introduction; (2) Setting purposes for reading; (3) Silent reading; (4) Discussion and comprehension questions; (5) Skills lesson and exercises; and, (6) Enrichment and practice reading. Since every child in every level must receive all of these instructional steps with each basal lesson, careful managing of these components is the key. Here is a schedule which illustrates a weekly program for a forty-minute reading class with approximately thirty students who are arranged in four reading groups. Note that the teacher is only providing direct instruction during steps (1) and (3). At other points in the schedule, the teacher facilitates as students work independently.

To bring this schedule to life, here is a typical Monday. The class period begins and it is time for Level A reading group to meet in their designated area for their New Story Introduction (1). New words are reviewed, background information discussed and purposes for reading established. This instruction takes approximately 10-15 minutes. Then, Level A students begin to read silently, freeing the teacher to help other children who are working independently. During the same class period, the teacher is scheduled to meet with Level C for their Story Discussion and Skills Lesson (3). This usually takes 20 minutes. While the students in Levels A and C have been receiving teacher directed instruction, other students in Levels B and D have been busy completing tasks related to the stories they have started at different points in this cyclical schedule. The four day cycle continues in the same fashion for all four groups.

(Days)	M	T	W	Th
(Levels)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
A	Introduce New Story with New Vocabulary; Set Purposes for Reading	Silent Reading; Students Answer Story Questions Independently	Teacher Directed Discussion; Skills Lesson	Students Work on Vocabulary Practice, Skills Exercises; and Independent Reading
B	(4) Students Work on Vocabulary Practice, Skills, Exercises; and Independent Reading	(1) Introduce New Story with New Vocabulary; Set Purposes for Reading	(2) Silent Reading; Students Answer Story Questions Independently	(3) Teacher Directed Discussion; Skills Lesson
C	(3) Teacher Directed Discussion; Skills Lesson	(4) Students Work on Vocabulary Practice, Skills Exercises; and Independent Reading	(1) Introduce New Story with New Vocabulary; Set Purposes for Reading	(2) Silent Reading; Students Answer Story Questions Independently
D	(2) Silent Reading; Students Answer Story Questions Independently	(3) Teacher Directed Discussion; Skills Lesson	(4) Students Work on Vocabulary Practice, Skills Exercises; and Independent Reading	(1) Introduce New Story with New Vocabulary; Set Purposes for Reading

*Friday is reserved for large group projects for reading enrichment.

II. Putting the System to Work

This particular system has several positive features. First, it assures each child the needed opportunity to receive personalized teacher directed instruction twice each week. Second, it guarantees that students will participate in all of the sequential

steps of a directed reading lesson. Third, the staggered schedule means that preparations, paper grading and record-keeping are somewhat staggered as well.

These and other advantageous features can only be realized, however, with effective implementation. The following procedures are necessary to insure such success: (1) After the instructional reading level of every child has been determined, a maximum of four reading groups per class should be formed. This may require that some students be shifted a level above or below their original placement. Such adjustments are necessary when setting up house for a reading system. (2) Students should be taught the steps for a directed reading lesson. Here is one way. Select a basal reading book which represents the average reading level for your class. Plan a *step by step* directed reading lesson around a basal story. Make a wall chart with the schedule and one which illustrates all of the steps for reading a story. Teach the lesson to the whole class, reviewing the steps in the process. This large group exercise should insure that students know and understand the basic instructional steps, their functions and their group's schedule in this reading system. (3) Since this system assumes that at certain points in the schedule students will work independently, it is necessary to prepare story lesson guide sheets. To be most helpful, these guide sheets should include all necessary information and directions such as the new vocabulary words, the story title and pages, purposes for reading, questions about the story, skill exercises to accompany the skills lesson, and independent activities to choose from. These guide sheets will serve the students for their entire four day study of one story. Since their preparation is time-consuming, this is one task the teacher-peer support group might share. (4) Often students are not equipped with adequate study habits. Consequently, they need some structure to encourage the development of such habits. Requiring that students turn in their guide sheets with all written work just prior to the start of each new story seems to encourage them to meet the deadline, and it helps the teacher keep track of papers by levels. (5) If you should decide to try this reading system, reading enrichment opportunities can be provided on Fridays. Another plan that works well is to simply plan a special project for one level at a time. If the project is a special learning center, you could rotate the center from level to level without interrupting the cycle.

This system is an extremely helpful way for teachers to manage a basal reading program in the typical middle school setting. It does, however, require preparation, planning and the cooperative assistance of fellow reading teachers. It is my hope in sharing this system that middle school reading teachers will have an additional tool useful in creating the most effective reading program for their students.

Part IV

Educational Enigmas



Preventive Discipline: Good Schools Make Good Kids

The age of accountability has brought with it a new commitment to basic education. Administrators, teachers, parents and even kids have found new meaning and purpose in the fundamentals. Teachers are more cautious regarding planning and record keeping; administrators are more aware of testing and evaluation; parents are in varying degrees and dimensions more demanding and yet supportive; and kids are in part cognizant of the air of accountability that envelopes their school world. While many of our fears regarding the stringent effects of accountability have been realized, good things are happening in schools to improve the quality of instruction for our children. Efforts are being made to provide students with the very basic competencies they will need to live successfully tomorrow.

Accountability, however, has not altered dramatically the one very basic handicap to effective teaching and learning; discipline. At the end of almost any school day, there is much more talk about kids' behavior than there is about instructional accomplishments or basic skills. In middle schools, where teachers are working with transescents, this is especially true. Though our kids may not be bouncing off the walls, we are nevertheless faced with the constant challenge of making them more teachable. In effect, we are forever searching for ways to improve discipline, not only to increase learning in basics but to promote healthy social behavior in the kids we teach. How we approach this challenge is critical in school and in the classroom.

I. From The Outside — In

The first step we can take towards effective school discipline is to recognize that discipline ought to be a preventive and integral part of our total school organization and not something done to kids just when they are "bad". From the school perspective, this premise suggests that the way we organize our schools can alter considerably the way kids behave while they are there. What organizational variables invite discipline problems and what changes can be made to reverse those effects? Four assumptions with corresponding recommendations are presented for your consideration.

1st Assumption: When middle schools are large and anonymous places for kids and there's very little opportunity for a sense of community to develop or for long term relationships to grow, kids get into trouble.

First Recommendation: To reduce anonymity and increase interpersonal involvement, middle schools must organize students and teachers into small and personal

learning communities or teams. Middle schoolers, who might otherwise feel lost, can find stability, caring and identity in a learning community of a reasonable size. This close-knit organization will dramatically reduce disruptive and destructive student behavior.

Second Assumption: When curriculum is dull, dry and dead there are few opportunities for middle schoolers to explore new areas of interest, kids become bored, listless and apathetic; so they cause trouble.

Second Recommendation: Students in every middle school ought to have enriching and exploratory learning experiences if we expect them to maintain interest in learning. Whether provided via some special program or within the academic classes makes little difference, so long as student interest and exploration are visible in the daily curriculum.

Third Assumption: When the school day is designed so that students have few outlets for physical activity outside of physical education, their energy begins to surface as a deterrent to learning and teaching. In some cases, kids literally do bounce off the walls.

Third Recommendation: Middle schoolers are active and need to move around frequently during the school day. If we do not structure opportunities for them to do so, they will anyway. Fighting Mother Nature will never work so I recommend working with her. Here are some ideas: have a longer period of P.E.; guarantee a daily P.E. class for every child; have a recess at lunchtime; or take a school recess at some prime time during the school day.

Fourth Assumption: When adolescents have personal problems which are emotionally unsettling, but have no adult at school they can turn to for help, then emotions play havoc with even the most elegantly designed lessons. These kids are often "out-to-lunch" or "out-to-punch".

Fourth Recommendation: Without question, every middle school ought to have a built-in advisory program so that every child has one teacher to know and trust. Moreover, that program should be a regularly scheduled part of the school day so advisors and advisees can get to know each other well enough to guarantee the working of that helping relationship. Caring guidance is preventive discipline.

I have advocated these programs in the past and will continue to do so. I hope their relationship to school discipline will validate them further and increase their use.

II. From The Inside — Out

A school's preventive organization *will* make a difference in classroom discipline, but it will not solve behavior problems altogether. Teachers still have a whole new set of organizational and interpersonal variables which must be arranged and rearranged in a preventive fashion. Kids just don't walk into class, sit down and get to work.

Before I venture into statements regarding classroom problems and solutions, I would like to confess my biases. I am not very fond of confusion, I dislike loud noise and I refuse to spend my time with kids constantly patrolling, reprimanding or monitoring. Consequently, I have searched through my experiences for helpful explanations of classroom discipline dilemmas and for solutions that work in a preventive way. My discoveries are capsuled as assumptions with recommendations.

First Assumption: When middle school kids do not know what's expected of them in terms of specific behavior, they'll run every test in the book to find out where there are windows and where there are walls. In the meantime, you'll be on the verge of a breakdown.

First Recommendation: During the first week of the school year, make a list of reasonable rules according to your standards and expectations. Put this list aside and out of sight. Then, devote some time with each class brainstorming a list of "Rules To Live By" which they feel should be adopted. Write their suggested rules on chart paper for all to examine. Then, show the classes your list so they can compare yours with theirs. Make additions, deletions or explanations as needed until a final list is agreed upon. *'Post It'*. Review these rules every day for at least a week. During the first few weeks, refer to the rules often, especially when one is violated. If Bill doesn't put his folder away before he leaves, ask Bill if he knows the rule on folders. Probably, that's all you'll have to say. There will be occasions when kids break rules continuously and other measures will be necessary. I would suggest you do everything but send that child away.

Second Assumption: Did you ever notice how many kids ask each day "What are we going to do today?" or "What are we going to do tomorrow?" It's amazing how even the most careless of students seem preoccupied with knowing what's ahead in the way of instruction. Middle school students need and want to know what to expect from day to day. They are unsettled by lessons that are too hard, too easy, and, perhaps more importantly, by those with unexplained significance or unexpected appearance.

2nd Recommendation: Make a weekly schedule for your learning area(s). For example:

Language Arts Schedule

M	Vocabulary
T	Study Skills
W	Journal Writing/Writing Skills
TH	Vocabulary Quiz/Writing Skills
F	Listening Skills/Oral Skills

Then, each day until this general schedule changes, every student knows to some extent what to expect. (Naturally, your schedule could be far more specific.)

In addition, make a dittoed calendar for your grading period. Give each student a calendar to keep in his/her class folder. When assignments are due or the schedule changes, you can refer to the calendars with your class. Once again everyone has a sense of what's to come.

Further, you might try posting an Agenda for your daily class plans. An example might be:

Tuesday's Agenda

1. Lesson "The Main Idea"
2. Practice Activities
3. Review of "The Main Idea"
4. Film on "The Main Idea"

When students walk in, they know exactly what's on for the day.

Third Assumption: Kids get into trouble, or cause it, if we ask them to sit still and listen for much longer than 20 minutes. Pretending that middle school students have any greater attention span does more harm than good.

Third Recommendation: Varying the nature of your instructional activities during a class period, can yield remarkable results. (Notice Tuesday's Agenda). Beyond that, however, is my suggestion to teachers to avoid extended periods of lecturing when possible. Furthermore, it is advisable with middle school kids to schedule a real-live three minute stretch break so that students don't take breaks throughout the class period. When they know they have a scheduled time to stretch, they're more apt to stay on task till then.

Fourth Assumption: When kids feel you don't care, they don't care either. It's as simple as that!

Fourth Recommendation: Kids will know you care by the way you teach, but all too often we forget how nice it is to have someone say so. With middle school kids, open statements of affection have a tremendous impact. Very often when I remind my students of our rules or encourage them to settle down, I remind them that I'm doing so because I care about them and want to help them be the best persons possible. I mean it—they know it—and that in itself is preventive discipline. Indeed, a little love goes a long way!

III. Both Sides Now

Before a new year moves ahead of us, let us move ahead. There are school changes we can make in time and classroom changes we can make today. As we service this time of accountability, let's remember that discipline is more than a means to an end. Good discipline is an end in itself as it works to help children help themselves.

My suggestions are limited but they are offered because they are 'tried and true.' I hope that a preventive approach to discipline will work for you.

Responsibility: Discipline Revised

PRINCIPLES OF RESPONSIBILITY-TAKING

Admit it! You have caught yourself daydreaming about students who are independent, dependable, responsible *or* fantasizing about teaching in a high school *or* wishing you could close your eyes, whisk a magic wand and have your kids suddenly transformed into responsible young adolescents. Don't feel badly, because you're not alone. Anyone who works with middle school kids shares the same plaguing preoccupation with responsible behavior, and how to get it. Parents echo teachers with their comments about their kids: "They won't do their homework unless I nag," "They are lazy," "They won't do their chores." What parents and teachers really want to know is how they can get youngsters to take responsibility without having to threaten, nag, or entice them.

Unfortunately, there are never easy answers to hard questions, but there are answers, nonetheless. Before tackling the question of how to promote responsible behavior, I'd like to set forth some assumptions about responsibility and its development:

1. Taking on responsibility is risky, so middle school youngsters will only attempt it when they feel in control, on top of things, and safe from guaranteed failure.

2. Responsible behavior is behavior that demonstrates concern for others. Middle schoolers will learn to be responsible in the context of a fellowship of caring relationships with teachers and peers, where interdependence is as important as independence;

3. Responsibility emerges from personal success in responsible roles. Middle school learners need opportunities to be successful and productive in authentic ways;

4. Responsibility is holding up your side of a commitment. Middle school kids need practice in making and being held accountable for their commitments.

5. Responsible individuals take initiative. They're independent, rather than dependent. Middle school kids need the time, opportunity and encouragement to take initiative; to go it alone!

6. Responsibility matures slowly and public schools are not necessarily designed to promote real responsibility taking, so teachers have to fight both nature and the system. Believe it or not, though, schools can become places where kids grow in responsibility.

GROUNDWORK: CHANGING THE BIG PICTURE

Overall school features play an important role in the teaching of responsibility. Some schools are organized in ways which promote responsible student behavior; others are not. If middle schools want to make a grassroots effort to promote responsible behavior in students, then three priorities deserve their attention.

First, middle school youngsters are perpetually uneasy about themselves, others and their surroundings. This uneasiness is problematic when it comes to helping them towards responsibility taking. To reduce early adolescent uneasiness, and to increase middle school student's sense of personal control, middle schools should be organized so that each student sees his school world as reachable and controllable. Large and anonymous school environments produce kids who often feel alienated, powerless and ineffective, who shun responsibility and choose apathy and deviance instead. Smaller, more personal communities make it possible for students to be known and acknowledged as unique persons and meaningful contributors. Inter-disciplinary teams or communities have provided large middle schools with one extremely viable organizational alternative.

Second, significant opportunities for decision-making responsibilities should not be limited to an elected student council designed to represent the whole school. Smaller communities must be accompanied by smaller more relevant governing arrangements, so that youngsters in middle schools do, in fact, contribute to the shape of the immediate school world. Student governing opportunities should be year-long components of instruction provided by the learning community. As an example, community decisions could be fed through community meetings run not only by teachers but by students as well. Students should be able to see the results of their personal contributions to the school community. They should be close enough to participate and to appreciate the products of their participation.

Third, middle schools need to make a once and for all commitment to involving the community in the teaching responsibility. Whether it takes place inside or outside school walls, youngsters must have opportunities to connect what they do in school with what's important in the larger society. Kids who spend afternoon upon afternoon watching TV, only participating vicariously in responsible social roles, desperately need authentic responsibility-taking experiences. The school could solicit help from individual community members and/or parents to provide apprenticeship experiences for its children. By cooperating with parents and community, such experiences could enrich curriculum, boost community-school relations and yield more responsible young adults.

These three priorities represent horizons for middle schools. As we consider future organizational changes, we should examine ways in which our middle schools could be smaller, more personal communities, settings for participatory democracy and doors to the real live community.

BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN KIDS

Rules: Reasons for Responsibility

Every classroom has procedures and expectations which provide structure for the learning situation. Often teachers generate reasonable and logical classroom rules, present them to students, and then are disappointed when kids ignore the rules. For

middle school kids, simply obeying the *teacher's* rules yields very little personal satisfaction. Kids will only see rules as reasons for responsibility when they have had a chance to design the rules. Then, following the rules involves sticking to their word and not someone else's.

In addition to involving students in the creation of classroom rules, insist that every rule be understood in terms of the consequences it was designed to prevent. When the final list of rules is thoroughly discussed, refined and understood, post it as "We Agree" statements.

Even with well-developed rules, violations are inevitable. There are, however, several recommended measures teachers can take to further stimulate responsibility-taking when such violations do occur:

1. Curb your temptation to demand "Quiet" when noise is the disrupting behavior. While such demands and related threats may produce immediate results and may be at times almost necessary, they do not encourage responsible thinking and behavior. When possible, teachers should try to use any rule-violation as an opportunity to refer to the "We Agree" statements and their underlying reasons. Simply reminding students that they've made a deal and that they're responsible is far better than assuming the responsibility for controlling the change yourself.

2. You shouldn't be the only one in the classroom who's on the lookout for rule violation. Every student should have a rule buddy or coworker to assist him in following classroom rules. Students can often prevent problems from growing worse and they can help in making a classroom run more smoothly. Teachers can empower this rule buddy role by making reference to the rule buddy when a partner is at fault. Holding kids accountable for one another is a new concept for so many, so go slow at first!

3. Teachers that work together on teams should try to coordinate classroom rules so that students on a team can expect the same structure from class to class. This can work wonders with responsibility if the students are in on the rule writing.

What To Say, When and How?

Classrooms are filled with conversation. Teachers are continually talking to students, with students and sometimes even for students. Naturally, with so much instructional time devoted to talk, what we say, when and how, really makes a difference!

If we're concerned with developing more responsible students, we ought to be as careful with our use of praise as with our use of demands and threats. Praise may sound much nicer but it's not necessarily any better. In fact, research suggests that the extensive use of praise may promote student dependence, rather than independence. Students tend to learn very little about personal satisfaction and intrinsic rewards when they rely on teacher praise for guidance and support. As an alternative, teachers should work to initiate student self-appraisal, sharing in the pleasure that students find in their own successes.

In leading class discussions, conducting group lessons or just managing classroom affairs, teachers are more likely to encourage responsible behavior if they talk less, have students talk more and use student ideas in structuring the dialogue or discussion. Similarly, teachers who wait longer for a student response after asking a question encourage students to assume some responsibility for thinking of an answer. If the teacher asks a question, pauses, and then almost immediately calls on someone

else or answers the question for the student, students will learn to sit back, relax and wait for someone else to get the job done.

There are other kinds of daily verbal interactions which can carry the responsibility message to students. In particular, teachers have to model independence and responsibility and can do so in a few simple ways. When you are really angered by students or other everyday happenings, try to take responsibility for your feelings. Try using what Gordon calls an "I Message" (*Teacher Effectiveness Training*, 1974). State how you're feeling, what's making you feel that way and what problem is caused for you by what's happening. Here's one:

"Tim, I get very frustrated when you keep tapping on your desk, because I can't concentrate while teaching this reading lesson." The responsible expression of feelings conveys an important message: I am feeling badly because of what you're doing and not because of who you are. Students won't feel crushed but will feel stimulated to respond, by changing what they're doing. That's a step toward responsibility.

Responsibility in Learning

Students vary in their ability to work successfully on independent learning tasks. To some, freedom is enticing; to others, it is intimidating. As a result, standard prescriptions for independent learning are rarely appropriate. Teachers need an array of options from which to choose. Here's a modest list.

1. During the course of a school year, give every child at least some chance to learn something on his own and in his own way. It may be that you select some small objective which the child learns using his own choice of resources in his personally created learning activities.

2. Have students work in learning teams with common learning goals. The team should be responsible for its members so that everyone must be sure that everyone else understands the assignment, completes the assignment and succeeds on the test.

3. Peer-teaching is an extremely useful way to encourage responsibility in modestly independent learners. Students can rely on their areas of expertise, can prepare for the actual teaching and can feel rewarded by the real responsibility inherent in someone else's learning.

4. Have students keep records of completed work so that they learn how to monitor their own progress. Make a checklist for each week or term and hold students accountable for accurate record keeping. Send a copy to the parents.

5. Don't grade everything! Let students work in teams to grade or proofread work. Do this regularly so that it's a serious and continuous classroom activity.

6. Learning centers or stations for review, reinforcement, enrichment or exploration are perfect for beginning independent learners. Students don't have to decide what to study, when to study it, and how to study it, but they have to apply themselves in a self-instructional setting.

7. Students should have a chance now and then to set their own due date for an assignment. Give them a span of time, let them pick a date and then no excuses.

RESPONSIBILITY RESOLVED?

Encouraging responsibility is serious business. Our success or failure is critical to the lives of the children we teach and to the survival of a healthy and productive society. In the new year, please include in your resolutions the following: "Be responsible for teaching responsibility."

Managing the Mainstreamed

A Problem To Be Solved

Since the advent of mainstreaming, the middle school classroom is a different kind of place for both teachers and students. While our classrooms have always been characterized by a wide range of abilities, styles, and needs, they now house more youngsters who are exceptionally different. Today, nearly two out of three handicapped students are part of the regular classroom and it is precisely these emotionally, mentally or physically handicapped and learning disabled youngsters who bring to the middle school classroom a new set of extreme differences created an unprecedented challenge for teachers. Unfortunately, many teachers who started out with positive feelings about mainstreaming have grown increasingly frustrated as they have struggled against often incredible odds to be effective with their exceptional students. Now, many middle school teachers are beginning to wonder if there's life after mainstreaming?

Public Law 94-142 is rooted in sound principles. Few teachers would deny this, but many are growing concerned that in reality we are doing far less than maximizing the potential of handicapped students. In fact, for some exceptional students, the regular academic classroom is more like the "Bermuda Triangle" of school life where more often than not, they disappear unexplainably. Caring teachers witness these students getting lost in the classroom shuffle, yet feel at a loss as to how to remedy the situation.

Making matters worse, the academic teacher and the exceptional education teacher are often worlds apart, separated by limited time, funds, and conflicting teaching responsibilities. Consequently, the regular classroom teacher is faced with the new experience of teaching the handicapped with very little assistance. Meanwhile, the mainstreamed students pass from one academic class to another with a growing sense that they are the unwanted school children.

This reality certainly doesn't match the dream that mainstreaming advocates have held for handicapped learners. Dreams, however, are always hard to build in the real world, and mainstreaming is no exception. Managing the mainstreamed is a task beset with numerous problems. Since it is not a task we can neglect, though, it is best to focus on solutions. How then can middle schools be more responsive to the mainstreamed student? What can teachers do to manage the mainstreamed?

Survival of the Mainstreamed: A Middle School That Works

Middle school proponents have long advocated the Interdisciplinary Team as the most appropriate instructional organization for early adolescents. Much of the rationale for the team concept has been rooted in an understanding of the early adolescents' need for a sense of personal recognition and identity. When teachers and students are arranged in smaller, more personal communities for teaching and learning students not only feel as if they are a part of a team but they feel known as persons by their teachers and peers. Fewer students get lost in the shuffle since there are four adults who collectively guard the welfare of a community of kids. Instead of wandering from unconnected class to class, the team creates a connected world for the student.

It is precisely this connectedness which is so desperately needed by our mainstreamed students. In addition to being vulnerable as early adolescents, these special youngsters need every opportunity to feel known, understood and secure. With a team setup, the mainstreamed child has a better chance of being a real student and not just an item in the lost'n'found, more lost than found. Moreover, the burden of teaching an exceptional child is suddenly shared by teaming teachers who can join heads, hands and hearts in providing the team's exceptional students with the exceptional care and planning they need. Added to that advantage is the increased likelihood of communication with the exceptional education teachers who serve the school. Instead of having to deal with many individual staff members, the exceptional education teachers can discuss specific students and appropriate instructional practices with a whole team of teachers at one time. This arrangement not only saves time but provides a mean for important dialogue among all of the staff who serve these special kids.

In addition to the Interdisciplinary Team arrangement, the middle school can be more responsive to the mainstreamed by providing those students with a special school advisor and homebase. While this has long been a suggested middle school component, it now finds new meaning and rationale as the middle school is faced with the challenge of its mainstreamed youngsters. These students are particularly in need of the guidance and support a Homebase or Advisor-Advisee program can offer. Building a school where each and every middle school child has a guardian angel is extremely valid and with handicapped youngsters, it's exceedingly important.

While both of the above suggestions can make a dramatic difference neither will work if, for convenience reasons, all the exceptional students are placed on one team in the school or in a select few Advisors' classrooms. This requirement can hardly be stressed enough!

Other important provisions can be made to enhance the educational experience of our exceptional students while assisting teachers in managing the mainstreamed. Since our exceptional education teachers possess knowledge regarding how these youngsters should be taught, disciplined and managed, better use must be made of them. Special staff meetings should be held periodically to provide academic teachers with key insights or instructional ideas for managing and teaching their mainstreamed kids. The exceptional education staff members could also offer occasional help sessions if time and money were available. Team or department meetings should include regular opportunities for dialogue regarding specific exceptional students. Finally, focusing more on students, every effort possible should be made

to minimize the "exceptional" identity. This goal should include such subtle considerations as the location of special education classrooms, the titles given to a student's special education classes (i.e., instead of (L.D.) Learning Disabilities class perhaps Humanities or instead of E.H. class perhaps Social Studies), the use of behavior contracts, the ways exceptional students are allowed to participate in schoolwide responsibilities and events and the way we as teachers respond to these youngsters in our classes.

Survival: Tactics for The Teacher

For most teachers, it is the last of the above consideration which poses the greatest problem. Just what can teachers do to give exceptional students the exceptional treatment they may need without making them look like the odd ones? Having described several school viables which can be rearranged to promote effective mainstreaming, let me share a few simple teaching ideas which were of tremendous help to me in managing my mainstreamed classes:

1. All of my students have a class folder used for record keeping, graded papers, or work yet to be completed. These folders are kept in the classroom and used daily. Very often my mainstreamed youngsters would be required to complete a special assignment or would simply be required to get started at the beginning of the class period without my direct supervision. Taking advantage of the common folder, I made a special daily comment sheet for my mainstreamed students. It included space enough for teacher and student comments for one week. Each day I would take all of my mainstreamed students' folders and write a set of personal directions on each of their sheets. In addition to describing what they were going to do step by step, these comments included statements of motivation, inspiration, and caring. Before a class period was over, I asked these same students to write a note telling me what they did that day. These simple comments made the world of difference.

2. Whenever possible and appropriate, I would include my mainstreamed students in those activities and assignments provided for the whole class. Since often these assignments would be too demanding for the handicapped student, a peer-helping arrangement was established in advance. This worked beautifully allowing even my most disoriented student to complete, for example, a beautiful book review, of which he was very proud. In some cases, a peer-helping team could be comprised of a gifted and a handicapped student.

3. One step at a time teaching has helped my mainstreamed students. By this I mean having the student complete one step of a task, then checking with me, then moving on. This seems to give many of my handicapped students the needed feedback for continued on-task behavior. Dividing the tasks into manageable steps is the key to success.

4. The inspired, gifted child can very often get slighted simply because he/she doesn't seem to present the overt problem of the handicapped child. They do, however, require special attention. Independent study contracts have been an exciting for many of my gifted youngsters who need opportunities to go beyond the instruction contained within the four walls of my classroom. These contracts are written up with some teacher-guidance and they are designed to help the student explore a new topic or investigate a new question using a variety of resources and reporting

their findings in a variety of ways. Then, if appropriate they can share their new knowledge or products with the class.

Examining the way we work with mainstreamed students as teachers is bound to help, but middle schools must also review their total school plans to evaluate their responsiveness to the challenge. If we want to manage our mainstreamed transescents we must resist the temptation to just get by. While we might succeed in doing so, our exceptional students won't!

5. Every classroom should have a "Student for Hire Board." This is intended to announce every student's special talents or skills to other members of the team or class. If a student is an exceptionally good writer, he/she might put up an ad for proofreading services. With handicapped, mainstreamed youngsters it's imperative the teacher assist these students in acknowledging their key talents. Talents can be utilized during class, in other classes, or outside of school. What's particularly nice about this idea is that many exceptional students have nonacademic talents that might otherwise go unnoticed.

6. There will be times when for some reason your mainstreamed students need your attention but you're just not available. Those are the times when these kids either get into trouble or get lost in the shuffle. If, however, these students understand that when this happens they have several specified constructive options, chances are you can save the day. Make a special chart with suggestions. Include a dittoed copy of these suggestions in these students' folders with some place where students can check off those they do. Make some special reward provisions for completed constructive options. See what your mainstreamed kids can do when they're on their own!

7. Analyze your expectations. What do you expect from your mainstreamed students? To sit still for fifty minutes? To listen attentively for fifty minutes? To volunteer to answer questions in a large group? To let you know when they need help? While some of our mainstreamed students may indeed be capable of living up to some of these expectations, many are not. In fact, even most middle schoolers, by virtue of their developmental characteristics, are not. Careful consideration should be given to revising our expectation so that we don't set ourselves and our students up for failure. Revising our expectations, however, doesn't mean we should eliminate the important expectations that accompany effective teaching. I have heard too many teachers, frustrated with their mainstreamed kids, say, "I just settle for whatever I can get." With any group of students, the effective teacher knows what is to be taught, believes that he/she is going to teach it, and sets out to give it his/her best shot.

8. Mainstreamed kids need a little extra help each day. They don't need for that extra help to become public knowledge. Middle school teachers must find ways to give their mainstreamed students a little extra on the side. A good rule of thumb is to keep your eyes open for floundering kids and then make sure your help is provided discretely. It took one of my students six months to learn his locker combination. He wasn't proud of that. Extra help during lunch, before school or after school made all the difference.

I'm certain that this list could be much longer. It's intended to be a start to the longer list you can create. The important message is that in spite of the difficulty mainstreaming can present, we can't give up on our exceptional kids.

Resolutions for Middle School Teachers

“ In the months ahead, which will it be — progress or preservation? If we grow numb to novelty, become subdued and defeated and retreat from the critical challenge of teaching transescents, we will have lost the spirit of renewal that our middle school classrooms assuredly need. ”

After every New Year's celebration is but a fading memory, do resolutions and their complimentary spirit of progress fade as well? Perhaps we say as our good intentions slip away, that we have already encountered overwhelming roadblocks or elaborately constructed detours rather than the open highways and covered walkways we had expected. Perhaps your vision of a better middle school and a better teaching experience has lost its sparkle and, like the New Year's champagne, gone flat. In today's economically and ecologically troubled society, we often find ourselves poised between our notions of progress and our need for preservation, our glittering hopes and our caution for how-to's, our resolutions for reform and our strategies for survival. For the middle school teacher this position is particularly precarious. Surrounded by uninspiring realities such as minimal funds, overloaded classes, little or no planning time, and the almost haunting obsession with the basics, we are tempted to surrender to the side of preservation casting all dreams of new beginnings to the wind.

As we move into the future, then, I would like to propose a series of resolutions for middle school teachers. Each of the resolutions serves as an invitation for you to

courageously step out, try something new and add new color and life to your teaching.

Resolutions For Middle School Teachers

1. When first conceived, the middle school was imagined as a student-centered institution for emerging adolescents. At that time and today as well, student-centered meant that the middle school would reflect in programs and practices the nature of the student it was designed to serve. Many middle schools today have the appropriate programs and practices which suggest that they are student-centered, but all too often the authenticity of a student-centered school evaporates behind its classroom doors.

For too long, classroom rights and responsibilities have been exclusively teacher-centered and what we teach, how we teach and how we resolve classroom problems have been decisions reserved for the classroom teacher. What I would like to see is the development of many more student-centered and democratic classrooms where students and teachers join hands in decision-making, collective problem-solving, joint planning and shared responsibilities. Resolving to create classrooms which are truly student-centered does not mean classrooms ought to be student-controlled. It does mean, however, that as a new goal we devote time and planning to any of the following: involving students in planning for future lessons, units or topics of study; surveying student interests, opinions or recommendations regularly and acting upon them; designating class time to the discussion of a class problem, task or goal and sharing efforts required to meet with success or resolution; determining class rules as a class; and letting students assume significant responsibilities for the class functions, appearance and management, (i.e., record-keeping, regular clean-up, bulletin board jobs, etc.).

Small steps taken to build a student-centered classroom can yield remarkable results. When students believe that what they have to say really counts, they take an added interest in the subject of study, their fellow classmates and their contributions to the class as citizens.

This is the first of my resolutions.

2. Teaching relevant subject matter has long been a concern while teaching the relevance of the subject matter we teach, has received far less attention. In a number of middle schools, I have asked students to explain why they were studying, for instance, Roman Numerals or the structure of a sentence, or the parts of a book or the muscles in the human body, and almost inevitably they were uncertain or without explanation. A frequent response was, "That's what my teacher is teaching". If our subject matter is relevant as indeed most of it is, and if we have valid educational reasons for teaching it, then I propose as a second resolution that we teach the relevance of what we teach.

Middle school kids can be readily discouraged by work that is presented without rhyme or reason. I would wager accordingly that the more time we spend on teaching subject relevance, the less time we would be forced to spend coaxing or cajoling disinterested learners. Teaching subject relevance demands that we do more than present a one or two minute overview of our objectives. According to my interpretation, it implies that we might spend, for example, one week out of a two week unit on Metric Measurement understanding how the Metric System fits into the

world outside the schoolhouse walls. It is my hope for the sake of so many middle schoolers who have concluded that school is just a series of games, that middle school teachers will work diligently to teach their reasons for teaching what they teach.

3. Striking research examining future trends in education points to a wide gap between the school and the community. This gap is, in my opinion, a powerful force contributing to the problems of motivation, discipline and achievement which prevail in middle school classrooms across the country. Though no one resolution will lessen the gap, I am convinced we must resolve to connect ourselves as teachers with the homes and communities of those children we teach. If you teach students numbering in the hundreds as most of us do, then a communication network can be designed so that teaming teachers share the communication responsibilities for a team of students using an advisory or homebase program. Participating in this resolution for about twenty-five to thirty students might involve regular and frequent phone calls home, personal letters to family, inviting families to class outings and visiting homes when feasible. Unfortunately, these are examples of exceedingly valuable procedures recommended but rarely used.

I encourage middle school teachers to make every effort to build stronger ties with the families of the students they teach. A well-planned calendar of communication is often best since it discourages us from only involving parents when 'Billy is in trouble.' Opening lines for communication of good news as well as bad news, is the crux of this third resolution.

4. The current preoccupation with the basics has many of us reluctant to turn students free to question, experiment and explore. As a result, our students are spending too much time in their seats completing assigned pages in a text or innumerable purple dittos. Certainly the exploratory programs adopted by many middle schools have offered new horizons for our youngsters, but what sort of opportunities for exploration are we offering the students in our classrooms?

Teaching the basics does not suggest that we ought to reduce our instruction to what is dull, dry and dead. In fact, recent studies illustrate clearly that for adolescents the more enriched the curriculum, the more skills our children acquire. Consequently, my fourth and final resolution proposes that we turn to the arts as a resource for enriching instruction in the basic academic areas. The use of music, drawing, pictures, photography, film, dance, drama, poetry and crafts can add a dimension of self-expression and self-discovery that I believe is critical to successful instruction in the middle school. Reserving experiential learning and the arts for special classes make little sense when our students spend most of their school day in the academics and it is there that improved motivation and achievement is most wanting. Include the arts in your next lesson no matter what subject you teach.

In sharing these four resolutions I have acknowledged four key areas which I believe ought to receive special attention in middle school classrooms. The creation of student-centered, democratic classrooms where students know why they're learning, what they're learning, are engaged in self-discovery and self-expression, and whose parents are more intimately involved in their learning experience, is a broad-based goal worthy of our efforts. **Speaking teacher to teacher, professional to professional, I urge you to work conscientiously to make our classrooms better places for those special kids we teach.**

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